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HAVE MERCY UPON ME

THE PRAYER OF THE PENITENT IN THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM EXPLAINED AND APPLIED

By REV. ANDREW MURRAY

AUTHOR OF
'ABIDE IN CHRIST' 'THE HOLIEST OF ALL'
ETC. ETC.

'To the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed upon us in the Beloved'

3313

London
JAMES NISBET & CO.
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1896

TRANSLATED FROM THE DUTCH

BY

REV. J. P. LILLEY, M.A., ARBROATH

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

THE Christian Church has always taken a deep interest in the devotional exposition of certain portions of the Scriptures. There are some chapters of the Word of God that may be said to mark fresh epochs in the development of the spiritual life; and it has been found a most helpful practice for the ministers of the gospel to take them up in the worship of the congregation, and make them verse by verse the theme of exhortation and appeal.

The Fifty-first Psalm is on all hands acknowledged to be one of these cardinal portions of the Bible. Yet the number of detailed expositions of its meaning is comparatively very small. This result has unquestionably arisen from the felt difficulty of doing anything like justice to its searching and humbling utterances. Much as the Psalm has been used in preaching, ministers have felt so keenly the inadequacy of their efforts to set forth the fulness of

its teaching, that they have been glad to leave their lectures unpublished. No more diligent student of 'the Treasury of David' ever lived than Mr. C. H. Spurgeon. Yet in writing of his study of the Psalms, he did not hesitate to use these words: 'In commenting upon some of them, I have been overwhelmed with awe, and said with Jacob, "How dreadful is this place! it is none other than the house of God." Especially was this the case with the Fifty-first. I postponed expounding it week after week, feeling more and more my inability for the work. Often I sat down to it, and rose up again without having penned a line. It is a bush burning with fire, yet not consumed; and out of it a voice seemed to cry to me: "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet." The Psalm is very human, its cries and sobs are of one born of woman; but it is freighted with an inspiration all divine, as if the great Father were putting words into His child's mouth. Such a Psalm may be wept over, absorbed into the soul, and exhaled again in devotion; but, commented on—ah! where is he who having attempted it can do other than blush at his defeat?'

It is under no sense of having been able to succeed where others have failed that the honoured minister of the Dutch Reformed Church at Wellington has been led to present the following exposition

of this great Psalm. A glance at the tender and beautiful preface which he wrote for his own congregation will show that he cherishes very different thoughts. It is only because he feels that this Psalm contains a message which the present state of spiritual life in and around the Church sorely needs, that he has been led to send forth this volume. The late Dr. Duncan of the New College, Edinburgh, used to tell his students that the one great heresy which afflicts the Church and keeps back the conquest of the world for Christ is defective views of sin. It is because this Psalm contains such an unreserved revelation of the soul's experience under the felt guilt, misery, and corruption entailed by sin, conjoined with an equally marvellous insight into the loving-kindness and tender mercy of 'the God of all grace,' that this fresh attempt to unfold its meaning has been made.

From this aim it follows that the whole exposition has been of set purpose written with the utmost simplicity. It is not 'wisdom of words,' but words of wisdom set in sentences which every reader can understand at once, that this hard-driven, weary generation needs. We shall be greatly surprised if the perusal of this little book does not prove to many the starting-point alike of a deeper conviction of sin and a more holy and consecrated

life. Such is the prayer of the translator; and he is sure that it will be echoed wherever Mr. Murray's writings are read. The English version of his book on *The New Life* has recently been translated into Japanese, and has received a cordial welcome from the native Christians. Shall we not expect that the following wise and penetrating study of this matchless Psalm may find its way over as wide a circle? For so the word of the Lord has free course and is glorified.

J. P. L.

Arbroath, 1895.

PREFACE.

To the Members of the Netherland Reformed Congregation in Cape Town.

'THE GRACE OF GOD BE WITH YOU ALL.'

BELOVED in the Lord, receive in this prayer for blessing the greeting with which I offer you this book, with the assurance of my heartfelt longing and prayer for you all. It may at the same time serve as an intimation of the pregnant subject and the blessed aim in connection with which I have been stirred up to present this volume to you.

The grace of God: a more glorious topic could not possibly be named. In that one word *Grace* all that is wonderful and worthy of adoration in God, and all that is glorious and desirable for man, finds its highest expression. The grace of God: what does it not include? The everlasting compassion with which the heart of the Father was filled for us, until it at last overflowed in the gift of His beloved Son; the unsearchable richness and

fulness of the grace which is seen in the love and the redemption of His Son; and the blessed gifts and operations of the Spirit, of which everyone of the innumerable host of the redeemed is a witness and an example: all that is precious and blessed in the faith, the experience or the hope of believers, and all that is inexpressible in the expectation of that eternal happiness which is beyond all understanding—all this is the glory of the grace of God. He that knows, possesses, and finds it, has life and salvation.

In this little work I have endeavoured to set before you something of the glory of the grace of God, alike in its first principles and its higher operations, according as this Psalm has given me opportunity. The misery from which grace redeems, the work that it does, the way in which it may be obtained, the blessing and the joy and the power which it gives, this and very much more is presented in it so simply, so intelligibly, and so strikingly, that I am assured the consideration of it cannot possibly be fruitless.

That it is also not unneedful, I know by experience. From many a conversation in my pastoral intercourse, alike in other congregations and here in the city, it has become very plain to me that there are many, even well-meaning people, who have very defective, if not entirely wrong, ideas about the grace of God. By this means they suffer inestimable loss. Wrong views about grace exercise an unhappy influence upon the whole life.

I do not desire that they should simply receive what *I* have to say to them about grace, but what I desire is that they should go with me to the Word of God and understand what *God* says about His grace, in order that our thoughts about that which grace is and does, may entirely agree with the thoughts of God. Beloved, would that we could indeed endeavour to lay aside all merely human conceptions, all inherited ideas about grace, and with childlike submission inquire what God Himself says of it. He who thus yields himself with humble prayer to be taught of God, and who holds himself prepared to receive simply and without contradiction what God says, shall truly learn to understand grace. Amidst all the various words of this Psalm, that one word 'grace' remains its overmastering thought. The grace of God: would that it may be also for our souls the one topic that takes possession of us.

And what of the object which I have in view in limiting you to this topic? *The grace of God* BE WITH YOU ALL. Yes: that the grace of God may be with you, and may be your portion and your joy, is, in truth, my desire.

I am afraid that there may be some among you who shall read this book that have not yet known the grace of God in truth, that have not, indeed, found grace, because they have not yet sought it from the heart. They have long since heard of the grace of God, and yet it still remains strange to them. To all such I would fain set forth the

desirableness and the indispensableness of the grace of God. In the light of God's grace, I would fain turn their attention to their sins, if by any means they might learn to deplore them with the penitent of this Psalm. And with their eyes fixed upon their sins, I would fain turn their hearts to think of the grace of God, if by any means they might learn to desire it, so that their earnest prayer might thus be: 'Have mercy upon me, O God.' I would fain come to them with this prayer for blessing—The grace of God BE WITH YOU; it is seeking you, it is for you, it will bless you, and be with you. You have need of it, and there is no hope or salvation for you if you do not have it. Pray, suffer it to come to you and be with you. Yes: beloved friends who have not this grace of God, with all earnestness I will cry to God and ask it from Him for you—The grace of God BE WITH YOU. Pray, do not repel me when, as your minister and your friend, I ask you to listen to me, while I proceed to exhibit the grace of God to you, and in God's name endeavour to impress it upon your heart that there is grace also for you.

I am quite sure that there are others among you who lift up the prayer of this Psalm with all earnestness, and yet do not taste the joy and the blessing which ought to follow upon the prayer. These still retain wrong ideas concerning the work which grace is to do, the way in which it manifests itself, and the conditions on which it may be expected and received. To all such I would fain

point out what a complete provision there is in the grace of God just for their needs as sinful and very wretched souls. I desire to make them see how suitable, how free, how simple, how certain, how mighty, and how completely within their reach, the grace of God is. I would also have them know that their desires are certain to bring them to faith, and their faith to a blessed experience. I would, above all, direct them to this prayer for blessing: 'The grace of God be with you.' You are praying for it, you are seeking for it as if it were afar off. It is for you; it is very near you; simply receive it; only believe; suffer grace to be with you. And especially do I wish for all who may read this little volume to make this prayer with my eye fixed upon the God of all grace.—'The grace of God be with you.'

I pray and believe that there may nevertheless be among you not a few who already from the outset in hearing the prayer, 'Have mercy upon me, O God,' have learned to know in their own experience the blessed grace of God. For you not less than for others have I written these pages. This Psalm, which is ordinarily regarded as chiefly intended for those who are penitent, or who are seeking salvation, contains such glorious representations of all the rich blessing which the grace of God will implant in the soul, of the joy which it gives, the power it exercises, the confession it draws out, the God-glorifying thanksgiving which it enables the soul to yield, that it cannot be other than helpful for you also who

believe, to understand what we may be by the grace of God. O brothers and sisters, come and see with me in this Psalm the height to which grace exalts the penitent, and hear what the new song is which it puts into their lips in place of the prayer of the publican. Come and understand what your God will do for you. 'Grace be with you': experience it in its full power and in all its blessed operations, in all, especially, that it is to be for you. Only give yourself unreservedly to it, and do not remain content with anything less than all the riches which it will bestow upon you.

'The grace of God be with you all.' With this prayer I commend both you and this little volume to the Lord. May He graciously use it for blessing in the congregation where He has set me to work. May He also grant that where I laboured in earlier days, or where the living voice can no longer be heard, it may not remain unblessed.

Your minister and servant in the Lord,

ANDREW MURRAY.

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Introduction.

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David: when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

'The history of the Psalms is the history of the Church, and the history of every heart in which has burned the love of God. It is a history not fully revealed in this world, but one which is written in heaven. Surely it is holy ground. We cannot pray the Psalms without realising in a very special manner the communion of saints, the oneness of the Church militant and the Church triumphant. We cannot pray the Psalms without having our hearts opened, our affections enlarged, our thoughts drawn heavenward. He who can pray them best is nearest to God; knows most of the spirit of Christ; is ripest for heaven.'

—J. J. S. Perowne.

I.

THE PSALMS.

A Psalm of David for the Chief Musician.

THE Book of Psalms is the innermost sanctuary, the thrice Holy Place of the sanctuary of the Bible. In the rest of the Bible we receive instruction from God on the way to draw near to Him. In the Book of Psalms, God sets open the door of His secret dwelling-place, and He shows to us how His believing people come to Him, speak with Him, and enjoy fellowship with Him. There we see the throne of grace surrounded with suppliants, and we learn to pray. There is the grace of God manifested in the most glorious way.

To use another similtude, it is with the Book of Psalms as it is with the lowest class of an infant school. In the higher classes, which are all somewhat advanced, the teacher says what they have to learn. They must know how to help themselves, and have need of his help only from time to time. But with the youngest class, which is learning the 'A, B, C,' a different method is taken. Every letter must be pronounced before them, and, indeed, singly

dictated to them. The teacher must put the sounds for them into their mouth, until they learn to pronounce and know them for themselves. It is in this way that the Lord God deals with us in the Psalms. He comes as the Faithful One, still nearer to us than in the rest of the Bible. He bows still more tenderly to our weakness. He Himself puts into our mouth the very words with which we may come to Him. He is aware that we do not know how and what we should pray for; therefore He comes and tells us for what we ought to pray. And when we take these words of His into our mouth, and continue to express them with the desire to understand them in order that we may feel and pray as it is there expressed, then He gives us His blessing, and His Spirit makes the words living and powerful in our souls. Precious Psalms, in which God's Holy Spirit Himself teaches us to pray.

This book will become yet more precious to you when you consider in what way the Lord God has dictated to you the words in order that you may pray after them. Has He sent to us from His high heaven directions for prayer as if He had ordained them there for us? No: in that case they would not be truly human, nor would they be adapted to our condition upon the earth. No: the Holy Spirit has taught us to speak truly in the language of men, with the feelings of men, and from the heart of men. The Lord has taken men of like passions with ourselves, and sinners such as we are, in every

possible condition of need and misery. He has taught them by His Holy Spirit to utter these prayers, and to commit them to writing; and now He offers them to us as a Prayer-Book adapted to our need. Adapted to our need, I say, because they come from His Spirit, and are therefore divine; and yet just as genuinely human, because they come also from those who are our flesh and blood, and are in everything like ourselves. That, too, is the reason why the Book of Psalms has been so precious to all sinners who are anxious about salvation, and has also proved such a blessing to them: the reason, too, why it will become precious to you, my readers, if you earnestly desire to seek after God. In other books of the Bible much is presented to you about sin and conversion, and the conflict and blessedness of believers. But here you may see and hear these believers themselves. In the Book of Psalms you have the key of their inner chamber. There you may see them in their intercourse with God. There you hear how one confesses sin and entreats forgiveness; how another praises God for His grace, and pours out his heart before Him. There you may kneel down alongside them and pray along with them. Your heart will become inflamed by their repentance and their faith.

But what do I say? It is not only the inner chamber of believers that is open to you in the Psalms; it is the innermost recesses of their heart. In solitude with God and in the light of His coun-

tenance, they lay all their misery naked before Him; and there you may see as in a mirror what wretchedness there must be in your own heart of which you still know so little. The whole hidden conflict arising from the sense of guilt, as well as conversion and faith, is there presented to you in living and visible form. There you may see how it goes with a soul who is under the working of God's grace. Never shall you learn to know sin, especially your own sin, aright, until you have learned to agree with the deep confession of the suppliants of the Psalms. And never shall you learn to glory in God and rejoice in His grace, so much as when you have learned to give praise and thanks with the poets of the Psalms.

It is for this reason, also, that souls desirous of salvation have at all times very deeply loved the Psalms, and that many of the most eminent of the saints of God have declared that the Psalms become to them, the longer they use them, the more precious and the more glorious, and that there is no means of grace more rich and stable than the right use of the Psalms.

Yet why should I speak of men? Think of the Son of God. It is He who has taught us the use of the Psalms, and sanctified them to us. When in the heaviest stress of His conflict He Himself has to lament, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' was that not a word of the twenty-

second Psalm written to meet His condition? And, when dying, He cried, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit,' was that not a word from another Psalm? And if the man Christ Jesus had need of the words of the Psalms to comfort and strengthen Himself in prayer to His Father, how much more must you, my friend, and I have our poor hearts prepared by these divine prayers to draw near aright to God.

The blessing arising from the use of these words, then, is great and sure—'The word is nigh thee, saith the Lord, in thy mouth and in thy heart.' God has in His grace so adapted the Word to us that wherever anyone takes these words into his lips and uses them, and then at once ponders them and expresses them, there a way is prepared for the Word to enter from the mouth into the heart. Through the gateway of the mouth the Word comes into the heart. You shall experience that the words of God are the living seed which germinates and shoots out roots, and springs upward and bears fruit. Your heart is the soil: you have only to open it, and you will experience that it is indeed the word of God which worketh mightily in you who believe.

My reader, I speak to you as one anxious to be saved. I invite you to meditate with me on the Fifty-first Psalm. Let us learn to pray this Psalm together. Let us ponder it, verse by verse, learning it by heart and receiving it into our spirit,

as well as uttering it before God upon our knees. For David this Psalm was the way out of the depths of sin to the blessedness of forgiveness, to a rich experience of the grace of God. This Psalm can also bring you and me into this blessing. This Psalm will do it for us, if we use and follow it faithfully. Reader, for God's sake, for your own soul's sake, I entreat you, prepare yourself with all earnestness to learn by heart and to pray this Psalm. The blessing which it will bring you is inconceivably great.

II.

PSALM LI.

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David: when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

IN the Psalter of David we find psalms of different kinds. There are psalms of thanksgiving for praising and thanking the Lord; there are psalms of instruction to teach us one portion or another of divine truth; there are supplicatory psalms in which God's help is entreated in the midst of distress or sorrow; and there are penitential psalms in which, after confession of sin and guilt, entreaty is made for forgiveness and redemption.

The Fifty-first is one of the seven Penitential Psalms, and, indeed, the chief among them. To understand it aright, we must especially attend to the position in which David stood when he wrote it. The superscription above the Psalm tells us this. David had fallen very deeply into sin. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. Even this was not all. He had tried to conceal his sin; and when he did not succeed in

this, he had Uriah put to death. Even this was not the worst element in his case. Had he but really felt and confessed his sin, all might have been well; but for well-nigh a whole year he continued hardened. It was only after the birth of his child, when God sent the prophet Nathan unto him, that he came to a true sense of his sin. Nathan had drawn from him a sentence of condemnation against a rich man who had robbed a poor man of his only pet lamb. It was only after the king had uttered the sentence, and Nathan had exclaimed, 'Thou art the man,' that he humbled himself, and acknowledged, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'

The prophet had thereupon announced to him in the name of God: 'The Lord has taken away thy sin. Thou shalt not die.' This, however, was not enough for David. So amazed was he now at the sight of what he had done, that he went to the Lord in deep self-abasement to confess his sin and entreat from God to bestow upon him by His Holy Spirit His divine grace for the forgiveness of sin and renewal of his heart. It was at this juncture the Psalm was written, that is, 'when the prophet Nathan came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.'

The reason, then, why I would fain have you learn to understand and take home to your heart this Psalm is, because I think that its lessons are so necessary and, indeed, indispensable. We are taught in our Catechism that there are three elements in the spiritual life which we must know if we would

live and die as saved souls. These three elements are, How great our sin and misery is; how we can be delivered from them; and how we should live in thankfulness to God for this deliverance. And nowhere shall we find these great lessons concerning misery, deliverance, and thankfulness more clearly explained than in this Psalm. Let us pray God to open our hearts to them, and to imprint them deep in our spirit.

The first lesson is this: *how terrible the might, the power, and wretchedness of sin are.* Think but for a moment who David was: the man after God's own heart; 'the man who was exalted on high; the anointed of the God of Jacob; and the sweet Psalmist of Israel' (2 Sam. xxiii. 2). Think of the wonders God had wrought by him and had manifested towards him. In what deep trials he had been purified; how highly God had honoured him, and how gloriously he had praised God; and yet see what became of him whenever God abandoned him for a moment and gave him over to the bent of his own heart. Into what fearful sin has he fallen, and how long does he remain hardened in it? Nothing but the Word of God by the prophet can bring him to an awakening.

I fear that there are many amongst us who do not know their sins, and have but imperfect ideas of them. The thought fills me with great sorrow; for, until they know their sins, they cannot really come to confession of guilt or the experience of mercy. They shall die in their sin. When it is too late—in eternity itself, they will see what sin was. And

that is the reason why I, as a servant of the Lord, come to you with this Psalm. I would fain set before you the sin of David, and, like Nathan, say to you, 'Thou art the man.' I would show you, if indeed, perhaps, you do not yet know it, how corrupt the nature of man is; and how your heart, respectably as you may live in external things, is, nevertheless, the source of all sin, and makes you capable of all sin, if God does not keep you; and especially I would fain show you how fearful the power of sin is to blind a man. You do not know your sin until the Spirit of God teaches you to know it. You do not know the real nature, the abominableness and the curse of sin, until God makes it known to you; and therefore, I entreat you, come with me, listen to the prayer of David, a man of God. You shall learn what you do not yet know of sin and its fearful misery.

And there you will further learn *what a glorious redemption is to be found with God.* Meagre thoughts about sin and the confession of sin lead one to think little of mercy and the redeeming power of God. It is supposed to be something that is self-evident, and that may be very easily taken for granted, that one should obtain forgiveness and enter into heaven; but in this Psalm you will learn something different. You will see that great things must be done in you. David feels that he must be washed by God from his sin, and that his transgressions must be wholly blotted out. He asks further that he may be entirely purified within, and may be

renewed in heart, and that the Spirit of God may dwell in him always.

My reader, come with me and you will hear from David what must take place in you before you can be saved. You must be washed in Jesus' blood, and be born again by His Spirit. And this Psalm will teach you that this glorious redemption is prepared for you; that however sinful and helpless you may feel, you have access in prayer to a God who can and will work all of this in you. The prayer of David is indeed designed by the Spirit of God to teach you how you must come to God, and what you may certainly expect and receive from God.

And then you will also further learn *what a thankful life that of the redeemed soul is.* You will understand in this Psalm how gloriously one who is partaker of the redemption of God feels himself knit to God. It becomes his one desire to praise and to serve this God. It is a joy to him to make known to others what God has done for him, and that not as a burden which is laid upon him, but as a work of love of which his heart has need, and for which the grace of God gives the power. You will also understand how grace will sanctify, not only the hidden life of the heart, but the outward life and conversation and walk; so that the redeemed soul may be known for the honour of God as one who through God has become an entirely new man. And you will also especially see how all this is wrought by grace, and given to a sinner of like feelings with you and in the same misery

with you. Yea, in this Psalm you will see a man first confessing his sin in the deepest misery and anxiety, then under the working of the grace of God receiving redemption, and finally glorifying God as a redeemed and emancipated soul.

Beloved reader, this way you must also tread if you would be saved. And I long for your salvation. Therefore it is that I call you to join me in the study of this Psalm, in order that you may see how God saves a soul. Be not afraid of the earnest words which we shall speak to you about sin. The man who is not consciously a sinner and an ungodly soul, Christ will never save. Be not afraid concerning the difficulty of the way of salvation; you shall at length see how God will do everything of which you have need. Be not afraid concerning the high holiness and the life full of thanksgiving in which you must walk. You will see that God demands nothing which He does not first bestow, and that the service to which He calls you is a blessed and joyful service of willing love, love which is awakened by His love shed abroad in the heart.

Gracious God, may we truly learn all this.

I.

The Great Petition.

1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.*

2. *Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*

'After Thy loving-kindness, Lord,
have mercy upon me:
For Thy compassion great, blot out
all mine iniquity.

Me cleanse from sin, and throughly wash
from mine iniquity:
For my transgressions I confess;
my sin I ever see.'

—SCOTTISH PSALTER.

First Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness.
—Ver. 1*a*.

HERE we have the first word of the penitent sinner. In this utterance we have the key of true prayer. In this word we also find the key to the whole Psalm. He who does not sincerely fall in with this word will never understand the rest of the Psalm. The prayer of David will be for him as a sealed book.

And we must not think that this word may be understood so easily, and, as it were, of itself. During the long period before David was brought to humiliation by the Spirit of God to know his sin aright, he could not of himself use this simple prayer,—only the soul which has been brought to an awakening by God Himself can be in a position to use this word in prayer with the whole heart. And he only who uses it in prayer from the heart can truly understand it. This must especially never be forgotten. David has learned to utter this prayer upon his

knees with a broken heart, in bitter sorrow for his sin. Much reading and much thinking may be necessary, but they are not enough for the right understanding of this prayer. It must be uttered *upon the knees*, with self-abasement, and *to God*. Then only can it become a blessing to us. Let us therefore look continually to God for His light and teaching, until by using it in prayer we have made this Psalm our own.

'*Have mercy upon me, O God.*' The true suppliant believes *that there is mercy with God*. That with God there is mercy, is the greatest wonder of the divine being. The omniscience of God is a wonder. The omnipotence of God is a wonder. God's spotless holiness is a wonder. None of these things can we understand. But the greatest wonder of all is *the mercy of God*. Here upon the earth we think but lightly of this, and imagine that it cannot be otherwise, and are but little surprised at it. But it is not thus in heaven. There men are humbled at the thought of it, and never cease to adore and thank God for His mercy. For there God is known as the Holy One. It is known there that it is His honour to maintain His law, and to manifest Himself against sin as a consuming fire. It is known there what sin is: the shameful rejection of the Perfect One—of His law and His love. It is known there how entirely deserving man was of being rejected by God, and therefore it is that in this mercy of God such high glory is seen. That He should still have compassion for our fallen race; that He Himself should pay the ransom for our sin at the cost of the

blood of His Son; that He should long after the ungodly, forgive them everything, and receive them to be His children,—all this is so great that the angels cannot marvel sufficiently over such mercy. And it was because David had heard that there was such mercy with God that he draws near to Him with this prayer. We also must endeavour to understand and believe that there is mercy with God.

Have mercy upon me, O God. The suppliant also feels *that he has need of mercy.* Mercy is something that is entirely undeserved, a boon to which we cannot lay the least claim. David feels that his sin is so shameful, and makes him so guilty in the eyes of the holy God, that it would be equitable in God if he should be condemned. Heaven would be bound to praise God if He vindicated His honour and His law in this manner. Man has nothing of which he can boast. If he has served God at an earlier period, that only makes his guilt the greater. It is not God alone that condemns him; he condemns himself. He feels that he is entirely deserving of the judgment of God; for his sin had shown how he had withdrawn from God notwithstanding all the goodness of God towards him. He feels that it will be a marvel of mercy if such a sinner is still thought worthy to be made a friend of God. Yea, the true suppliant feels that he has need of mercy; that nothing but free grace alone can be his hope.

Have mercy upon me, O God. The true suppliant desires also *that mercy may be shown to him.* He knows that there is mercy, and he feels that he is

one who has need of mercy; a fitting object of mercy. And yet this is not enough for him: he has need of more. He desires that God should show His mercy towards him, and make him conscious that this mercy is also intended for him. He knows that the showing of mercy must be a personal action of God towards the soul. That God is merciful, he cries, that I know there is great mercy with God, that there is mercy for all, can still bring me no rest. What I need to make the anxious heart peaceful is, that I should know God is merciful *to me.* Be merciful *to me,* yes, *to me,* O God of mercy.

This longing is in full harmony with what God's word teaches us on these points. The word speaks always of *finding* mercy, *obtaining* mercy, *receiving* mercy, *partaking* of mercy, *having* mercy; and looked at from the side of God as an action, it is called *giving* mercy, *showing* mercy. Sin is a personal misdeed committed against the God with whom everyone of us has to do. Conversion, in like manner, is the coming to this God to receive redemption from Him in order that He may show mercy to the soul in taking away sin.

I am afraid that on these points there prevails in the case of many a great error. They comfort themselves with the thought that God is merciful. They have, however, no idea that this of itself will avail them nothing. This mercy must be given to them by God, and must be experienced in the soul. They forget that there is a work which mercy is to do for the soul, and that he who is not partaker of

it cannot enter heaven. They forget that God is the Righteous One as well as the Merciful; that ere His righteousness can liberate a single soul His holy law must be fulfilled, and the sinner, every-one for himself, must have part in the righteousness of Christ, and consequently in the acquittal of God. And thus with the word of mercy upon his lips, many a one nevertheless goes on to meet destruction: not because there is no mercy with God even for him, but because he has never obtained part in the personal experience of the work of divine grace.

My fellow-sinner, if you would learn to pray for mercy, hold fast these thoughts. First of all, *that there is mercy with* God: let your soul be filled with the thought that with God there is mercy, and that it is the highest joy of His heart to show mercy; and further, *that you have need of mercy.* In the sequel of this Psalm you will learn more fully how great your need is. Without mercy, you will be eternally and unspeakably wretched. But especially is this thought of the utmost importance, *that what you must have is a personal experience of this mercy as manifested towards you.* Something must find place betwixt you and your God. You must *have* mercy. Without this you may not rest content. God must do something for you. He must show you mercy. Let God's great mercy and your great misery be the two arguments which cause you to utter this prayer all the more earnestly, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness,' until you have found mercy.

Second Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.'—Ver. 1*b*.

IN this second half of the verse David gives a more precise explanation of what he meant in the first in the prayer, 'Have mercy upon me.' He knew that there was something that mercy could and would do for the sinner. It was his desire to experience this precious work; therefore he prayed, 'Blot out my transgressions.'

It is of the utmost importance that I should understand this. The general prayer for mercy is not enough. The Lord desires that we should know and say what we would have mercy to do for us. Was it not thus, for example, with the blind man who cried to Jesus, 'Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me'? Jesus called him to Himself and asked him, 'What wilt thou that I should do to thee?' He had already prayed for compassion, for mercy; but this was not enough. The

Lord desired still further to obtain from him the specific statement of what it particularly was that His compassion was to do for him. Thus it is still. It is not enough for us to remain content with a general petition for mercy. The Lord will test the earnestness and the reality of our desire for mercy by finding whether we also know what we would fain have, and whether we have also taken pains to know what mercy has promised and can give.

And it is just at this point that many souls err. Here, indeed, lies the reason that they pray for mercy so long and yet receive no answer. They have either very undefined or entirely wrong thoughts about that which mercy can do. Some think that the first work of mercy is to comfort and enlighten the heart. It is not so. Later on in this Psalm David prays for comfort and peace; but at the outset he prays for something entirely different. Others imagine that the work of mercy consists in the reformation of the heart and the life. This also is not the first element of blessing. Later on David asks for this also, but it does not stand in the first place. Others, again, suppose that they must ask for mercy, and trust in it that it will bring them into heaven when they die; but that in this life we cannot know if we have mercy. David teaches us that, as with the previous idea, this is not what he desired. What he wished to have, what the Spirit of God desires that we should be taught to desire by His prayer as the first manifestation of mercy, was this: 'According to the

multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.'

Our transgressions must be blotted out by God Himself. This is the conviction in which David drew near to God. He feels that transgression must be blotted out; that he himself is not equal to this work; that mercy must do it for him. An expression in Ex. xxxii. will make this clear to us. There Moses says to God: 'Now, then, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—; but if not, *blot me out of Thy book which Thou hast written.*' Our sins also are written in God's book. The law of God takes reckoning of every transgression that we commit. In the great account-book of heaven they stand against us as a record of our guilt. David knew that there could be no intercourse with the holy and righteous God so long as this old guilt was not abolished, was not blotted out. He knew that mercy could not convert or change the sinner, or bring him to heaven, unless his guilt was first blotted out. The wrath of God must first be appeased. The old guilt of the past must first be taken out of the way. The sinner must have acquittal and the forgiveness of his sins. This is the first work of divine grace. Without this, God the Holy Judge cannot receive the sinner into His friendship; and therefore he prays: 'Have mercy upon me. Blot out my transgressions.'

There are many who suffer incalculable loss because they do not understand this. Perhaps you also, my reader, are amongst the number. I shall

tell you whence this misunderstanding arises. It is because men remain unacquainted alike with the holiness of God and with the dreadful character of sin. This is why many suppose that if they but have repentance, and seek to live a better life, and pray to God, that God will on account of this great change receive them. It is not so, my friend. That you become changed is so far good. That you pray to be changed by the Spirit of God is still better. But this is not enough, simply because it does not clear off the old guilt. That you should wish to get quit of your guilt does not cancel it either with God or with man. What you must know before all else is this: how it stands with the guilt of your former life. Does it remain in God's book against your name? Yes or no? Is it blotted out? Yes or no? Until the soul knows that it is blotted out it can have no true peace.

Here then is manifest what we must entreat in the prayer: 'Have mercy upon me.' The blotting out of guilt is indispensable. We cannot work this out by our repentance. God has promised to bestow it. His promise is: 'I, even I, am He that blotteth out your transgressions for My name's sake, and will no more remember your sins' (Isa. xliii. 25).

This is what in the New Testament is called being 'justified'; as, for example, in the Parable of the Publican. He prayed to God, 'Be merciful unto me,' and he went down to his house justified. This was what grace did for him. This was the

answer to his prayer. He went down to his house with the forgiveness of his sins. Like David, he could sing when he obtained this answer to his prayer: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity' (Ps. xxxii. 1, 2).

Reader, does this appear to you too great and too wonderful? Remember that the tender mercies of God also are great. It is on God that David calls. He prays: 'According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies.' Do you come also and experience that this is indeed the great, the wonderful, the divine element in the grace of God; that it will blot out all your guilt freely and at once, and will remove it entirely out of God's book. O come and experience that this is the blessing and the power of mercy, to bestow the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake.

Third Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Wash me throughly from mine iniquity.'—Ver. 2*a*.

THIS verse must make the meaning of that which precedes still more clear to us. David entreats mercy. He expects the manifestation of it in the forgiveness of his sins. He longs that his transgressions should be blotted out of God's book, and taken away from before His eyes. But the sin on which he looks back presses also upon his soul. It not only stands recorded in God's book, but it has stained his conscience, and cleaves to him as an impurity which makes him loathsome in his own eyes. Therefore it is that he prays to be freed from the sense of guilt, from this consciousness of inner impurity. He knows that this same mercy can bring sin to nought at once in God's book and in his own conscience, and that the act of God in heaven is also an act of God in his own innermost spirit. Therefore he prays: 'Wash me throughly from mine iniquity.' He shows us that he knows

that the only way in which his sin can be removed is by a spiritual act of the grace of God. This must wash him from his iniquity.

And how came David to use such an expression for the work which he desired to be accomplished by grace? It was by the external washings and sprinklings of the Old Testament that he was led to this prayer. Under the old covenant every priest had to wash himself as often as he had to draw near to God in sacrifice. Every individual member of the congregation who had in any way but come into contact with that which was unclean, must also first be washed before he could mingle as one that is clean in the midst of the people. He knew that these washings had been intended by God to be symbolic representations of what must take place in the heart of man. They were a symbol of cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ. The New Testament speaks of Jesus as of 'Him who hath washed us in His blood.' Of believers upon the earth it says: 'Ye are washed'; of the redeemed in heaven: 'They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lord.' In the full light of these expressions let us ponder this prayer: 'Wash me throughly from mine iniquity.'

And what now is meant by our having to be washed *in the blood of Jesus*? The word of God has taught us in what way the sprinkling of blood under the old covenant was a symbol of the cleansing from sin. Everyone who had sinned was guilty of death. But God gives permission that he should bring a lamb or

another victim to die in his place. When, then, the blood of that victim was shed, it was the proof that the punishment of death which the man had deserved had been undergone; and when it was sprinkled upon the altar, it was as much as to say that this death, this blood-shedding, was accepted with God as valid, and that his sin was washed away.

And thus was the blood of Christ shed as a propitiation for our sins. We are all under sentence of death. We have sinned, and made ourselves guilty under the law of God. The law has uttered its curse over us as transgressors, and can by no means withdraw its demands until they are fulfilled. God would be no righteous God and no perfect Judge if He did not maintain the authority of His law and uphold its power, if He should welcome transgressors of His law into favour. And therefore no one can inherit heaven who is not by the law pronounced clean. And no one can possibly be pronounced clean who has not fulfilled its demands; and never has there been any man who of himself has been sufficient for this.

Therefore the mercy of God steps in betwixt us with the gift of His Son. Christ has in our place fulfilled the demands of the law. He was our Representative, who appeared in our nature, to do in our stead all that was required of us. He was our Surety, who paid the price in our place. He was the Lord of the law, but was born *under law* to fulfil its demands. He has honoured it by a perfect obedience. By dying an accursed death He subjected Himself to

its sentence in our behalf. He has borne our punishment. He has taken its curse upon Himself, and thereby He has rendered what He had to demand from us. In His Death, His Blood, His Soul, His Life is poured out; and, as was the case with the sacrifice, in the outpouring and the sprinkling of His blood lies the proof that atonement has been made.

And now it comes to this simply: that we should be *washed* in that blood. And what does this mean? Just as it does not avail anyone who wishes to be cleansed from his impurity that there flows past him a stream of water, if he does not enter into it, if he does not come in contact with the water, and there have his impurity washed away; so is it with the blood of Christ. You must have a personal part in it. Your soul must come into contact with that holy blood in order to experience the power of it. Christ is not come, as many suppose, to abolish the claim of the law, but to fulfil it. The law has a claim upon you, upon you personally and individually, and will ask you if you have obtained part in the righteousness and atonement of the Lord Jesus. The law will inquire: Have *you*, yes, *you*, been sprinkled and washed with the blood of Christ? If you have been thus washed, then you are also acquitted, not because the law has no claim upon you, but because you too are one for whom it sees that Jesus has fully met that claim. If you are not washed in that blood, then it avails you nothing that Jesus has died.

My fellow-sinner, see now what is necessary. See now what must have place with you, else there is no hope for you. Still does the Lord Jesus say: 'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me.' With all your praying and seeking, with all your piety, you shall not be saved unless the everlasting God does in you this spiritual wonder—unless you are washed in the blood of Christ. Do not, I pray you, despise the precious blood of Christ any longer, but hasten to God with the prayer of David: 'Wash me throughly from mine iniquity.'

Awakened soul, who art in perplexity with thyself and thy sin, pray, hear these glad tidings. Not only has the blood of Jesus been shed, but *God Himself is prepared to wash you in that blood.* God Himself will by the Holy Spirit bring your soul into an inner spiritual contact with that divine blood; will enable you to appropriate and experience the power of that blood. It is the work of God: He will do it. Only believe what the Word says to you. Believe that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin; believe that without any worthiness in yourselves you can by the imputation of that blood be in a moment freed from all your guilt. Believe that God is in thorough earnest when He offers that blood even to you, and in that faith in Jesus' blood let your prayer become all the more urgent: 'Wash me throughly from mine iniquity.' 'Through faith in His blood we are freely justified by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (Rom. iv. 24).

Fourth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'And cleanse me from my sin.'—Ver. 2*b*.

IT is easy to see that David's sin weighs heavily upon his soul. For the third time he pours out his desire before the Lord that His grace might liberate him from sin. Let it be understood that he does not speak of liberation from punishment. He does not speak even in the least degree of comfort in the restoration to God's favour. No: it is sin itself which is so terrible to him, and this he would fain have taken away. And that he felt deeply what sin was, is manifest specially from this, that everyone of the three utterances which he uses represents sin in a distinct light. He felt it as a *transgression* of the law of God, a violation of the honour and authority of His King and Lord. He calls it *iniquity* according to its inner character, because it was the exact opposite of all that was good and holy, utterly unrighteous. And he confessed it *as sin*, a condition of perversity and misery.

Concerning these transgressions of the law of God, he had prayed that they might be blotted out of God's book; concerning his iniquity, he desired that he might be washed from it; now, once again, in view of his sin, he prays for cleansing. In the earnestness of his soul, he makes known in the most significant way his desire for the redemption which he expects from grace: 'Cleanse me from my sin.'

The word which is here translated *cleanse* is the same which David found in Lev. xiii. and xiv. in the laws concerning leprosy. It appears there ten times, and is there translated: to pronounce clean. We are thus referred to these passages for the explanation. There we learn that whenever a fear arose that anyone had the leprosy, he had to be brought to the priest. Observe that if it was really so, then he pronounced him unclean. If it was really not this disease, however, then the priest had to pronounce him clean. So also if a leper had been healed of this disease, the priest had to pronounce him clean or unclean. After that, he might again return to the temple and have the enjoyment of all the privileges of the people of God. We see that in the New Testament, in like manner, the word 'cleanse', is always used of leprosy; and also that whenever anyone was cleansed by Jesus he had still to go to the priest in order to be pronounced clean in the name of God.

From these and similar passages it is manifest that for cleansing two things were necessary: this

purity, indeed, consisted of two elements. The one was, that the sufferer should be clean of his leprosy. The other was, that on the part of God he must be pronounced clean. In this Psalm we find that in the purity which is also expected from the grace of God these two elements also are found. When in ver. 7 we hear, 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean,' then, as we shall see in that passage itself, this has reference especially to pronouncing clean, to acquittal from guilt. When, later on, in ver. 10, we hear, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God,' this looks rather to the inner cleansing of the nature and the spirit.

Nevertheless there is manifest here a distinction betwixt the leprosy of the body and that of the soul. The leper must first be personally clean, and then he is pronounced clean. The sinner, on the contrary, is first pronounced clean, and then becomes more and more partaker of the inward cleansing. The distinction, however, is not so marked as it appears. For the sinner is pronounced clean only in virtue of his union with the Lord Jesus. Jesus, the perfectly pure One, takes him up into His purity, becomes surety that this purity shall be communicated to him. It is because he is clean in Jesus that he is pronounced clean, and then he becomes all the more inwardly purified. And thus the two aspects of purity have one root, namely, 'the purity of Jesus.'

And thus also the two are one. The same grace which pronounced clean also makes clean. The same

repentance which desires acquittal also longs for inward purity. And in this prayer, 'Cleanse me from my sin,' derived from the word of the Lord concerning leprosy, David appears to have embraced these two elements together. What he later on separates is here still united in this one supreme thought: 'I would be free from sin: take the sin which I have committed, take it away from me; take away from me the sin which is still hidden within me. Cleanse me from my sin.'

It was the work of the priest to cleanse the leper. David desired to have this priestly action at the hands of God Himself. He knew that, although this cleansing is a hidden and spiritual work, it is nevertheless thoroughly real. He knew that no repentance, no conversion, no change of spirit or life, could cleanse him from sin. He knew that there is only one, the Holy One, who is mightier than sin, that is in a position to cleanse him; and he knew that this God is the God of all grace, who will also do it. Therefore he prays: 'Cleanse me from my sin.'

Reader, what David found necessary you have also need of. He desired that the holy God would stretch out His hand from heaven and touch him: yes, him upon the earth, and take away his sins from him. O let this also be your prayer; consider it: sin is mine, it is upon me, it is in me. The purity which God gives may also be mine, on me, and in me. As really as sin is mine must the cleansing also be mine. Other-

wise, I may not be redeemed. Yes: make David's prayer your own, and make your own also that of the leper who cried: 'Lord if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.'

And if you fail to do this with thorough earnestness, go, contemplate your sin where David contemplated his. Read in God's word how wretched the condition of the leper was (Lev. xiii. 45, 46). Shut out from his fellow-men, from the temple and the service of God, he must continually cry out: 'Unclean, unclean!' This God ordained as a symbol of sin. Pray God that He may make you feel what a deadly and wretched disease consumes your soul; how you wander about, cast out from the presence of God and from intercourse with Him, and then pray: 'Cleanse me from my sin.'

And when you thus pray, Jesus will also say to you, 'I will: be thou clean.' The leper went out immediately, and was cleansed. Only believe in His power to cleanse, in His love which seeks you, in His grace sealed with His blood. You shall then know also, once for all, that the great deed of grace which you cannot now understand has taken place also in you.

Therefore, yet once again, my reader, let this prayer of David become your own. Like his sin, yours also is very great. As for him, so also for you, God is the only helper. Let your prayer, like his, be a cry from the whole heart: 'Have mercy upon me; wash me; cleanse me from my sin.'

II.

The Confession.

3. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

4. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Thy sight; that Thou mayest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.

5. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

6. Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

''Gainst Thee, Thee only, have I sinned,
in Thy sight done this ill;
That when Thou speak'st, Thou may'st be just,
and clear in judging still.

Behold, I in iniquity
was form'd the womb within;
My mother also me conceiv'd
in guiltiness and sin.

Behold, Thou in the inward parts
with truth delighted art;
And wisdom Thou shalt make me know
within the hidden part.'

—SCOTTISH PSALTER.

Fifth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'For I acknowledge my transgressions.'—Ver. 3*a*.

DAVID has prayed for mercy; he has asked that God would blot out his transgressions, and that He would wash him clean from the guilt of sin. He proceeds now to say further: 'For I acknowledge my transgressions.' He gives us thereby to understand for what reasons and in what spirit it is that he entreats mercy. He comes as one that is guilty to confess his sin. It is as one in this condition that he prays for grace. It is of the utmost importance for everyone who desires to pray from the depths of his heart in the words of David, 'Have mercy upon me, O God,' that he should understand and feel these words, and utter this prayer in the very same spirit.

This knowledge of sin is, indeed, the indispensable preparation for receiving the mercy of God. Man could do nothing to cover or take away his sin; moreover, God does not require this at his hands.

Only this does God command: *Simply acknowledge the unrighteousness which you have done.* God desires from him nothing but this: that he should acknowledge himself to be both guilty and lost. He must simply fall at His feet and confess the unspeakable misery in which sin has landed him. He must confess that he has sinned; that sin has made him worthy of punishment; that it would be righteous in God to cast him away; that he is also so entirely sinful that he can do nothing to make himself acceptable to God. As one that is guilty and utterly lost, he must submit himself to the sentence of God, and confess that it would be a wonderful act of divine grace if he were to be received. It is only when man is brought to the point of thus confessing himself to be in truth and entirely a sinner, that he shall receive mercy. Then he stands in the presence of God in his true relationship; then he can honour and praise God in truth for His grace.

And it is just this, nevertheless, that many who are seeking for grace do not understand. They imagine that the source from which a change of disposition shall take place in their hearts is God's suffering Himself to be persuaded to show them favour. They suppose that, whenever they earnestly repent and learn to pray with much penitence and love and deep conviction, God will then manifest His grace towards them. And therefore they are always taking much pains to make themselves, in the presence of God, as pious and as earnest as they

possibly can. They think they shall thus receive light and comfort. No, my friend, this is not God's way. God desires nothing from you but that you should really acknowledge your sin, and cast yourself down before Him as a guilty sinner. Then shall you receive His grace both certainly and speedily. It is as a transgressor, as one that is ungodly, that you are to come. On such a one forgiveness and life will certainly be bestowed.

The example of David also makes plain to us *the aversion of man from the confession of sin.* For a long time he was well aware that in the matter of Uriah he had made himself guilty of a violation of the sixth commandment, and in the matter of Bathsheba of a violation of the seventh commandment; but, as he acknowledges in Ps. xxxii., he endeavoured to cover and to silence his sin. He knew that he had committed sin, but he did not know the sin in its enormity and heinousness; otherwise he would have at once humbled himself on account of it. This state of mind endured for well-nigh a whole year, until he learned truly to know his sin. When, however, he could no longer restrain his convictions, he had no alternative but to pour them out and acknowledge them in the presence of God. And so is it still. There are many that call themselves sinners who are in some measure awakened to a sense of sin, but who yet take pains to forget their sin. They have the intention of sinning no more, and with this good resolution they come to God. They think that they feel their sin with sufficient

poignancy, and that it will make them too dispirited to ponder it deeply. They thus keep themselves back from really knowing their sin. The man who desires to receive grace must be willing to look upon his sin and ponder it, and to become thoroughly acquainted with it. The more thoroughly he makes the bitter confession, 'I acknowledge my transgressions,' the sooner shall he be able to express the sincere prayer for mercy, and the sooner shall he be prepared to receive grace. He shall experience what David says, after that he had found that the suppression and covering of his sin brought him no rest: 'I acknowledge my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin' (Ps. xxxii. 5).

This incident in the life of David also teaches us a lesson with respect to the knowledge of sin. It is this: *It is God Himself that must make our sin known to us.* It was only after the prophet Nathan had come unto him in the name of God with the word of conviction, 'Thou art the man,' that he cried out, 'I have sinned.' Man is by nature so entirely under the power of sin that he can hide it from himself even when he has committed it. This is one of the most dangerous manifestations of sin. It blinds the heart. It gives rise to pride, and makes man unwilling to humble himself. It is the work of the Spirit of the grace of God to make the soul acknowledge sin. Oftentimes conscience can make one afraid of punishment, but this fear is the

least element in the knowledge of sin. Sometimes trial or sickness or fear of death may make a man tremble with the dread of hell; but that also is one of the least elements of sin, and a very slender indication of the sense of guilt. God may use these things, and the fear which they awaken, as means to inspire us with a true knowledge of sin; but they themselves are still beneath the range of this knowledge. How many sick and dying men have I seen that prayed for mercy without any true knowledge of what sin was. My friend, who readest these words, forget it not: God alone can impart to you a knowledge of sin. Let it therefore be your prayer: '*Make me to know my transgression and my sin*' (Job xiii. 23). Jesus has given the promise: 'The Spirit shall convince of sin' (John xvi. 8). Let it become your earnest longing to be acquainted with sin. Ponder your sin; confess it before God; contemplate it in the light of God's law and word; endeavour to contemplate it close at hand as committed against the highest holiness and the eternal love of God; ask God to send His Spirit to you, as He sent Nathan to David, in order that you may learn to testify: 'I acknowledge my transgressions.' Pray, forget it not: there can be no real prayer for sin where this disposition is not found in the depths of the heart.

Sixth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'And my sin is ever before me.'—Ver. 3*b*.

IN these words David gives a more precise explanation and confirmation of his confession: 'I acknowledge my transgressions.' He tells the Lord what kind of knowledge this is. His sin has made such a deep impression upon him that he cannot forget it. It is not only a matter of the understanding. It has seized his heart, so that he can no longer get quit of it: "My sin is ever before me." The consideration of this word may teach the sinner who is praying for grace some new and weighty lessons.

'My sin is ever before me.' This reminds us of the *enduring*, abiding character of the sense of sin. A knowledge of sin is not a needful lesson which has to be learned in order that we may forget it again and simply go forward. No: it must prevail with each man to such an extent that he can never more forget it. Whenever one confesses

his sin, and then quite easily goes on his way, whether it be to give himself to the world or to talk of grace, that is a token that he is not yet thoroughly in earnest about his knowledge of sin. He who rightly understands his sinfulness, beholds in it so much that is shameful, so much that is heinous, that he becomes filled with this conviction. He goes forward continually bowed down under the thought of the great evil that he has done. Is not this what we expect from anyone who has done some extreme misdeed or other, and then obtains an insight into its character? Suppose, for example, that someone has committed a murder, and then obtains repentance for it: do we expect that he will speedily again go about laughing, or become very joyful? Surely not: especially if a sentence of death has been pronounced upon him on account of his sin. In like manner when the greatness of his sin has become known to the sinner, it becomes something to him that he cannot forget, especially until he is certain that he has forgiveness. He has sinned against God. He has made himself guilty against the law of God and the love of God. In the midst of all the occupations and distractions of the world, he testifies: 'My sin is ever before me.'

This is for him the great question of his life with which he has to deal. This is the one thought which he has to cherish concerning himself: 'I have sinned.' And nothing can possibly yield him comfort until God has caused him to know: 'Thy sin is forgiven thee.' And although one may come

to God with all sorts of fair words concerning the compassion of God, the soul still remains in this condition until God Himself takes away and blots out the sin. May we never at any time look upon sorrow for sin as something that is needless, and may we never seek or seize a mere superficial comfort. No: a knowledge of sin is necessary, and it is the work of God. Every soul must learn to say in the prayer for grace: 'My sin is ever before me.'

'My sin is ever before me.' This ought also further to remind us of the *personal* character of a true sense of sin. It is a sure sign of those with whom the confession of sin is not deep that they are always ready to say: 'Yes, all men are truly sinners.' It is as if the thought of the universality of sin made the guilt of each man in particular less. At least this consideration tends to draw away the thoughts from the guilt of each particular person. And then one is ready to imagine further, that there are others who are still greater sinners for whom there is nevertheless grace. Why should there not be grace also for me? This is the ordinary language of those who are not willing to think much of their own personal sin. They may have some knowledge, some ideas concerning the greatness of sin in general, but they do not say this: '*My* sin is ever before me.' This, however, is the language of the true penitent. He feels that he personally has to deal with God. He feels that he for himself alone has to deal with God, in death, in

judgment and everlasting punishment, and that it is of small moment to him whether there are others along with him or not. He sees himself as one that is condemned and lost in the light of God's law, and he has truly neither the time nor the desire to think of others. He cannot ask if the sins of others are greater than his own or not. He finds it sufficient to deal only with himself: 'My sin is ever before me.' He is quite in earnest with the confession: '*My* sin.' While there are many who are doing everything to make it manifest that sin is not their own, he acknowledges it with all his heart. One imagines that sin belongs to the devil: he has the guilt of it. Another fancies that guilt rests upon the world, and is dependent upon circumstances. A third, not perhaps in words but in his heart, says that sin comes by imputation from God, who caused that men should be born in this condition. But the true penitent cries: '*My* sin.' Yes: more than my property, or my house, my wife or my children, is sin my own. It is a part of me; no one can take it from me, or out of me, but God alone. O it is a confession of amazing earnestness: 'My sin is ever before me.'

My reader, do you desire mercy? See here, then, what constitutes an element in the prayer for mercy. I pray you, turn not away from the painful and humbling side of this confession. Consider no time or pains too much which you must use in order to make it thorough and cordial. There will be much that you may desire to lay aside; but be assured of this, there is nothing that so much concerns you,

there is nothing of so much importance to you, as your sin. In every thought which God has of you, in every movement during which His holy eyes are fixed upon you, this is the first and principal thing that He sees in you, your sin. Is it not, then, of the uttermost importance that you should see yourself even as God sees you? In every prayer for grace which you make, this is the first point to which God looks: whether you indeed desire grace, and long for it; that is, whether you truly abhor and condemn yourself as one that is entirely unclean, or whether your sins are to you thoroughly and constantly wrong, and whether as a sinner you shall know to receive and value the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Therefore be it yours with all earnestness to learn this lesson: 'My sin is ever before me.' Without this there can be no true repentance, no sincere prayer for mercy, no living faith, no well-pleasing fellowship with God. We are destined for the knowledge, for the enjoyment of the redemption of God here below, and still more for the heaven where blessedness and peace shall be the praising and enjoying of that free grace which has redeemed the ungodly.

I press these considerations upon you, just because I know that there are many who deal too superficially with the confession of sins. They are willing enough to confess that they are sinners, for all men are in the same position. But, alas! they know nothing of the tremendous earnestness of this confession. They do not utter it with shame; they

do not utter it before God and upon their knees; they say it without really hungering for grace. May God redeem many of my readers from this insensibility, and teach them to cry out in dead earnestness, and with a contrite heart: 'Have mercy upon me, O God; my sin is ever before me.'

Seventh Day

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.'—Ver. 4*a*.

IN this verse confession is now made of that in which consists properly the grievousness of sin. It is against God that it has been committed. According as the soul understands this, will its knowledge of the real nature of sin increase, and its insight into the reasons for which nothing but wonderful and divine grace can take it away.

In order to feel this we have only to think how on earth the heinousness of a misdeed depends on the person against whom it is committed. The same action is accounted much baser when done against a father than against a servant, against a king than against an ordinary subject; and this is the grievousness of sin, that it has been committed against God.

Yes: against God: and who is He? Is He not the Holy and Perfect One, who manifests Himself as a consuming fire against all that is evil? Is

He not the King and Lawgiver of heaven and earth, whose will is joyfully accomplished throughout the whole heaven? Is He not the Creator and Upholder, who has a right to expect at the hands of His creatures that they will do what He has created them for? Is He not the God who in accordance with that right has given us His law, and towards whom it was a matter of the highest reasonableness that we should show obedience? And against this God you have sinned; that is, you have withheld obedience from Him. You have refused to do what He hath commanded you. You have not hesitated to violate and to break His holy law. You have sinned against Him. You have exalted and chosen your will, unjust and perverse as it is, above His will. You have said that the counsel and the will of Satan is more attractive to you, and has more influence with you, than the will of God. As far as it was in your power, you have done your uttermost to rob God of His glory. You have withstood Him. You have assailed Him in His honour. You have dishonoured Him, this great and infinite God. You, a poor worm of the dust, you have affronted and insulted the high and holy One before whom angels prostrate themselves. And as God is the Lawgiver and the Proprietor of the universe, He cannot endure sin. He must maintain His right in the universe. Every transgression of His law violates that right, and the terrible wrath of God is kindled in order to maintain it. And against this God you have sinned. What think

you? The moment a man succeeds in once beholding this God in His greatness, does it not become self-evident that it is this which startles and bruises his soul: 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.' O what have I done? I have revolted from this God, the highest perfection: I have dared to provoke His wrath and curse: this God, without whom I cannot live, I have made mine enemy. Woe is me!

And this is still not all. There yet remains one thought which makes all this still more bitter for the awakened soul. The God against whom I have sinned is the God of love. He has not only shown me His goodness in the thousand blessings of this life, but He is the God of love and the God of grace who has revealed His Son Jesus Christ in His eternal glory. And I have been such a child of hell that I have dared to sin against this God. I have despised His Son, and turned my back on Him. O there is an inexpressible bitterness for the soul who truly feels this in the confession: '*Against Thee, Thee only*, have I sinned.'

It is this that makes sin so terrible. It is this that makes it so impossible for man to bring his sin to nought; for sin is an act of enmity against the holy God. And man is not in a position to recall this sin or to take it away. Every sin is an assault against the law and a violation of it, an inroad upon its authority of which by the law cognisance is taken, and nothing that man is able to do can possibly bring to nought one single sin

that has been committed. Sin has been committed against God. He has observed and marked it. It has assailed Him. He alone can say if He will forgive it, and He alone has the power to blot it out and to annul it. Yes: against God has the sin been committed, and with God must it be accounted for. Once again, this is the terrible element of sin that is expressed in the confession: 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.' And yet how little thought is bestowed upon this fact. Even in the case of awakened sinners, how much do they concentrate their thoughts simply on the view that they have sinned against themselves and their own happiness, and how little on what ought to cause them the greatest concern, namely, the fact that they have sinned against God.

My reader, let this be the goal of all your effort. Make it, I entreat you, a matter of much prayer. You have to do with God. On the great day of judgment you shall meet Him face to face. If you have not thoroughly learned to feel it, you will then experience to your everlasting horror what is meant by your having sinned against God. Even here it is grievous and painful to make confession; but far better be humbled here than be condemned for ever. And do not suffer yourself to be drawn away by anything from your endeavour to make this confession. There are thousands of so-called Christians who know nothing of this conviction of sin; but, bethink yourself, they shall not be able to help you in that great day. Many will say to you

that you must not make yourself too anxious about sin; but I feel bound to say to you that you have reason to be anxious about sin. You have sinned against God, and He is a consuming fire. Your sin is so great, the danger is so threatening, that it is in the highest degree unreasonable not to be anxious about sin. As certainly as you have sinned, has God uttered His sentence of wrath upon you, and it is only sheer folly to seek rest and comfort before you know that this God has taken away your sins. The God in whose hand your life is, is your enemy. He can at any moment suffer His wrath to flash out against you. O haste then, I pray you, to Him with the confession: 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.' And if your heart does not feel it so deeply as it ought to feel it, entreat Him to work out this result Himself in your heart. The Spirit who taught David the word will also teach you, if you continually make the petition, to say: '*Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.*'

Eighth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Thy sight; that Thou mayest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.'—Ver. 4.

DAVID is in thorough earnest with every confession. Under the pressure of what he feels so deeply, he for the second time confirms it all: 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.' On this word of his we have meditated. Now there follows yet another word: 'And I have done that which was evil in Thy sight; that Thou mayest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.' In these words he presents the reasons why he thus avows his sin. He desires to approve the sentence of God, and to acknowledge that His verdict concerning him could not be other than the righteous judgment which he had deserved. He has made confession of his guilt in order that God might be justified in His speaking, and be clear in His judging. He who prays sincerely for grace will en-

deavour to be inspired with this same feeling. Let us try to set before ourselves what it really means.

Consider the terrible nature of God's judgment. Accursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written to do them. This is the sentence of the Lawgiver. He explains that every single transgression of His law brings His curse upon man. He does not make any inquiry about the excuse which man might make, but the sentence is inexorable: 'The soul that sinneth shall die.' On every transgressor in the great day this word will go forth: 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.' And the soul that truly knows its sin admits that this sentence is not too heavy or too strict, is not more than it has deserved; and acknowledges that God is perfectly entitled thus to deal with sin and condemn it. The soul has made itself worthy of this condemnation. However intolerable the judgment of God may be, it feels that it is not too severe; it makes confession that it has sinned against such a God in order that on its own part it may confirm the truth that God is righteous. This was David's confession. He could adduce nothing on which he could plead for any other sentence. If he were still to be received, it must only be upon the footing of free undeserved grace. He was, in truth, in dead earnest with his sense of guilt. He must have had a sight of its detestable and execrable nature different from most men, in order to be able to speak thus: for he felt that the sentence of God was something terrible. In that anguish of

soul which he had for a long time endured he had had some proof of how terrible a thing it is to be abandoned by God. Yet he acknowledges the righteousness of the sentence, and yields himself to be laid hold of by it. That is surely something more than proceeds from man by nature. Such a sense of guilt and condemnation must surely have been wrought in him by the Spirit of God.

This becomes still more clear when we reflect further on the tendency of man to excuse himself. If David had been willing to listen to this, there was enough to which he might have appealed. Had he not served God from his youth upwards? Had he not for God's name and honour borne more than any other of God's servants? Would not the holy God Himself testify of him that he had walked with Him with a perfect heart? The Lord Himself had at a later period suffered it to be stated in His word that He had strengthened Jerusalem 'because David had done that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and had not turned aside from all that He had commanded him, all the days of his life, except only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite' (1 Kings xv. 5). And must this one sin of thoughtlessness be reckoned to him so severely? Would not an earthly prince know how to forgive a single transgression when committed by a faithful servant; and should not God the merciful and gracious One also forgive this sin of His own accord? There was no necessity for confession: God should not impute it to him. O it is thus that men speak

and think. They do not know the terrible reality of God's holiness, and of His judgment upon sin. They do not know that every single sin, although it be only one, is a violation of God's law, an injury to His honour, a proof of the enmity of the heart, and that it must be avenged. He bows himself before God, not merely because this must be done sometime, and because God is too strong for him. No: that is not the reason: he had such a view of the authority of God that he approved of God's sentence. He saw how good it was that the law of God should be maintained; how needful it was that, although the whole world should perish, the glory of God and the honour of God should be established; and, under the power of that feeling, he makes confession of his sin as committed against God alone, in order that he may give honour to God, and acknowledge that He was justified in His speaking and clear in His judging.

Once again, therefore, I say that this is surely more than proceeds from man by nature. Such a sense of guilt and condemnation must surely have been wrought in him by the Spirit of God. And the Lord has suffered it to be noted in His word, in order that we may thereby see how it goes with a man who is on the way of genuine repentance and conversion. O what a different experience is this from the superficial confession of sin with which most men rest content. They confess, indeed, that they are sinners; but the sin is a weakness, an infirmity, a misfortune. They have to sympathise

with the sinner, but of the honour of God they think but little. The poor sinner must be comforted; but whether the honour of God's law is maintained concerns them not. O my fellow-man, that is not repentance as the Spirit of God works it in the heart. No: he that is truly convinced of sin by the Spirit of God does not merely think of himself and what concerns him; but his great sorrow is that he has dared to commit transgression against such a God, with such a perfect law; and his great concern is how he can possibly restore that which he has destroyed; and since he can do nothing else, he lays himself down at the feet of God to yield to Him the only honour that he now can give, namely, to acknowledge that He is righteous in His judgment.

Reader, have you thus learned to know your sins? God has given His law to convince you of sin, 'that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world be made guilty before God.' Have you already given God this honour, although it may have been with trembling? Have you humbled yourself before Him as worthy of the judgment of God? Only he who does this, and who thus in truth shows himself to be a sinner, can receive mercy. O see to it that you really know and confess your sin. Without this there is no grace. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and He shall exalt you.

Ninth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.'—Ver. 5.

DAVID'S confession of guilt is not at an end. The sin against God into which he had fallen had shown him something new. At an earlier period he did not know it: now he felt and experienced it. It was this: that his whole nature was entirely and altogether impure from his very birth. The grace of God had from his youth marvellously preserved him from the stains of sin. His whole life had been devoted to the service of God. But, lo! here he at once becomes the prey of temptation, and he makes himself guilty of terrible sin against God. So far is it from being the case that his earlier holy life could comfort him, that this just constitutes the bitterness of his grief. His heart must indeed be terribly corrupted, the power of sin in him must be greater than he imagined, since after having received so much from God he could so sin. All at once

there is discovered to him the root out of which this sin has come to the surface. For a long time the grace of God had preserved him, and he ran the risk of forgetting that he was just as corrupt as everyone of his fellow-men. Now he has become known to himself, and lays himself down before God with the confession of this his inborn corruption. It is not this one sin that calls for punishment. 'But, lo! my whole nature is impure: thus, then, since sin is never lacking, I am a sinner who has need of grace.' 'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.'

The inborn corruption of our nature is thus an element of the true confession of sin. How perverted must be the ideas of those who appeal to that fact to excuse their sin. There are many who do this even when they confess their sin. They think that since they are sinful by nature the guilt of their sin is not so great. They cannot, indeed, be other than sinful. They were born so. They have their nature from God, and cannot help that it is so sinful as it is: a proof this that they as yet know nothing of the real abominableness of sin. Did they really know it, they would be so deeply ashamed of their sinful nature, and of the enmity towards God of which sin is the proof, that it would humble them still more deeply to remember that they are one with their progenitors in sin. In view of the unity of the whole human race they would see that God had put all of them to the test in Adam, and in this sense of shame they would be silent in the dust

before God. The confession of this inborn corruption, then, and shame for it, is also an indispensable element of a true confession of sin.

And thus alone does a man come to see himself as God sees him. Man looks continually at what is before his eyes, and when he continues protected against external sins, he does not think that his sinful nature is as much accursed as that of the open sinner. David ran the risk of being entangled in this error. When he had sinned, he learned to understand what he had been taught from his youth upwards; and it will always be seen in the most eminent believers, that they feel very deeply that they have in the depths of their inner life the germs of all ungodliness, and that grace alone has preserved them from the development of these evil seeds. O if this were truly felt, how would those who have been preserved from the ways of the ungodly in consequence of a Christian upbringing, nevertheless know how to present themselves in all sincerity alongside the greatest sinners. How would all of them subscribe to the representations of sin in God's word, and amidst much distinction in the outward manifestation of sin, feel that everyone of them was on the same footing as sinners in God's sight. For this reason also is the confession of natural corruption an indispensable element of the true confession of sin.

And thus alone is man truly prepared as a penitent to desire and to receive the work of grace. If they are but single sins that I have committed, I

can endeavour to make compensation for them. If I am inwardly and wholly corrupt, then every such endeavour is idle and vain. Then every effort for good becomes stained with sin, and I have need of a free divine forgiveness. Then I feel that I have need, not only of forgiveness of sins, but also of renewal of the heart, as David united these two blessings in this Psalm so closely with one another. According as the confession of this inward and outward corruption becomes deeper, is the surrender to Jesus and His grace more complete and unreserved, and grace itself more abundantly glorified.

It is, nevertheless, not simply the longing and the reception of grace that depends in large measure upon this confession. There will also spring from it a clearer insight into the plan of divine grace, and a cordial choice and enjoyment of it. When I see that my misery has its roots in my fellowship with the first Adam, then I see how my new union with the second Adam redeems me completely from it. When I apprehend to some extent how the fall of Adam destroyed me, because I am born of him and receive his life, I learn to understand how the obedience of the second Adam restores me, because I become one with Him, am born of Him, and really obtain part in His life. The divine worth, the fitness, the all-sufficiency of the divine plan of redemption is made clear to me, and I know how to seek my salvation in daily fellowship with that love which flows from God. Thus from every point of view it is clear that the sincere penitent must especially

make confession of the entire corruption of his nature from very birth.

Reader, have you thus learned to know and acknowledge this corruption of your nature? I do not ask if this is one of the points of doctrine which you have received from your youth. That will probably be the case. What I ask is: Have you indeed learned to abhor yourself as one that is entirely impure? Do you indeed regard yourself as loathsome in the eye of God, and inwardly so impure that you are good for nothing but to be cast out? Are you thus ashamed of your origin? Does it surprise you that God should still endure such an impure creature? Have you looked away from every endeavour to improve yourself or to make yourself acceptable to God? Is it indeed your deeply rooted conviction that there is no power but that of God which is able to renew you? You surely feel that there is still much lacking for such a thorough knowledge of your sin. O, ask God for it. He can give it to you by His Holy Spirit.

Tenth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.'—Ver. 6*a*.

THE confession of his sin has taught David how to lay bare its origin and root. From his birth onwards his whole inner life has been impure, and the thought of this leads him again to think of God as the Searcher of the heart, before whose eyes this inward corruption makes him worthy of rejection even when it does not openly break forth in sinful deeds. He feels that in his confession of sin, and his endeavour after conversion, and his hope in mercy, he must not leave this out of view. The God with whom he has to do is a God who desires truth in the inward parts. For us also it is of great importance, in our prayer for mercy, not to overlook this word. It will teach us lessons of the very greatest importance.

God desires truth in the inward parts. *This thought summons us to earnestness and godly fear in our sense of sin.* By nature we run so much risk of

dwelling more on the outward manifestation of sin than upon its hidden root and power. Whenever, in consequence of their upbringing or favourable circumstances, the outward life is religious and unblamable, many flatter themselves with the thought that it is also well with the heart: at least, that although they have still many sins, the heart is not quite so bad as has been said. They regard themselves at least not as ungodly, and enemies of God. When God's word uses such expressions, it cannot mean such as they are. O, did they but know how the Lord proves and searches the heart, they would think otherwise. The Holy One sees the indwelling corruption of the heart. There is no man that doeth good: no, not one. The holy God requires truth in the inward parts. The service which He receives must be completely true, in full agreement with His holy law. Love to God must fill the whole heart. If anything be lacking, then we stand guilty and condemned before God. He cannot be content with less than perfect holiness: a terrible thought this for the awakened soul. God desires truth in the inward parts.

How should this thought keep many a one from the superficial conversion with which men so often suffer themselves to be deceived. Whenever, upon a sickbed, for example, there is a little anxiety about sin and questions about grace, the soul is at once comforted. Men are not aware that these feelings can easily be awakened, and also very lightly laid to sleep again. The desires go forth for the help of

God without the soul's being prepared to abandon everything in actual life. The heart is deceitful above all things. Through the pious appearance of religion, people many a time deceive themselves. O that men might feel that God searches the very deepest recesses of the soul. That word of David should be a word of heartbreaking power in order to be at the same time a word of healing and quickening.

Thou desirest truth in the inward parts. *This thought gives hope and comfort in the way of conversion.* Nothing less will God have from the awakened soul: nothing more will the grace of God require from the penitent. I learn to know myself as guilty and worthy of condemnation: in me dwells no good thing. How, then, can I arrive at truth in the inward parts? How can this thought give me comfort? Well, in these ways: for him who knows himself as one that is lost by nature, the truth after which God seeks lies in nothing else than this, that man should present himself to God in truth as he really is. He who thus comes to God with the acknowledgment of his sin in his real condition, comes in truth. This is the sincerity of which the word of God speaks so much. There are many who imagine that sincerity before God consists in a great perfection, and in a very cordial dedication of themselves to the service of God. For the anxious sinner it is not so. He is not yet so far on the way. With him this is the highest sincerity, that he should present himself to God with all his misery, that he

should confess himself to be just what he is. He who confesses his sin certainly receives mercy. God desires truth in the inward parts. The soul who is desirous for salvation, and that rightly understands that word, may rejoice deeply in it. When you appear before God, do not endeavour to present yourself to Him as one that is pious, and to make yourself appear before Him at best with an animated religiousness. No: make confession of what you think, and feel, and do. Hide nothing from the Lord. Seek not to cloak your sin. Acknowledge the whole truth about your condition of sin and misery. God desires truth in the inward parts, and will not withhold His grace from you.

And when one has received mercy there is still a glorious application of that word. God desires truth in the inward parts. *This thought strengthens faith for glorious expectations.* The soul that has been endowed with grace has no more bitter conflict than over the deceit and unfaithfulness of the heart. It feels that there is so much which is still not in truth. In its faith, its love, its prayer, its dedication to the service of God, it everywhere discovers that it is not yet capable of serving the Lord with the whole heart and in perfect truth, as it desires. And many a time it is afraid that it will yet altogether give way. But then it finds in God's word this glorious promise: 'I will give them their recompense in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them' (Isa. lxi. 8). It begins to see that this is also a part of God's plan and promise to

confirm and to bring to perfection the work of grace that has been begun. *Thou desirest truth in the inward parts*: this it makes a ground of pleading, on which it entreats that God Himself would work out that process in which He has delight. And this word of David becomes thus the source of the most glorious expectations.

Beloved suppliant, in all your use of this Fifty-first Psalm, and in all your intercourse with God, let this word constitute the fundamental element of your prayer. Meet always with God as a God who desires truth in the inward parts. In all your confession of sin, in all your religion, in your whole existence, let truth in the inward parts be your desire, as it is the desire of God. And if you find that there is nothing good in you, that the more you strive after truth the less you find it, be assured that in all such experience the acknowledgment of this misery is already the truth which God desires. And when He has wrought this in you, so also will He bestow it upon you amidst all the spiritual conflict that remains. If, then, you long for this from Him who also desires it, and who on that account will take delight in bestowing it, it shall be given to you.

Eleventh Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'And in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom.'
—Ver. 6*b*.

THIS word appears to be a transition from the confession of sin to the prayer for redemption. God desires truth in the inward parts. To this thought David is led by the confession of his inborn sin. It was not only his transgression, but also his very nature, that made him worthy of rejection before God. He cannot by nature stand before the holy Searcher of hearts, who desires truth in the very depths of the heart. But this thought leads him again back to God, who alone has the power to bestow truth in the inward parts.

The very fact which has brought him low, namely, that God cannot be content with less than truth, also lifts him up again. If the grace of God receives him, then it will bestow upon him nothing less. In the hidden parts God makes him to know wisdom. There is here in the midst of

his prayer an expression of the hope that God will make known to him the way to be redeemed from sin; and that deep and penetrating as the power of sin was, such also his knowledge of grace shall be. He trusts that the spiritual insight into the way of redemption which he desires to walk in, shall be communicated to him by God Himself.

The whole Psalm is indeed a proof that thus it actually was so. We have in this Psalm the first clear explanation of the washings and sprinkling of the blood of the temple service, and the spiritual significance of the Old Testament sacrifices. The connection betwixt the forgiveness of sins and the renewing of the heart is presented in his prayer as clearly as almost anywhere else in the Old Testament. His hope was not in vain. 'In the hidden parts Thou shall make me to know wisdom.'

The anxious sinner who is seeking the way of grace may perhaps think that in this verse he has not so much as in others. Its instruction, however, is of the very highest value. In the prayer for grace this word is entirely indispensable.

It teaches you that *the true knowledge of the way of grace must be sought from God Himself.* He alone can make you know the hidden wisdom. The human knowledge of the way of grace which we obtain by the use of our understanding is not sufficient. Mark well: we do not say that this knowledge is not necessary. But this knowledge is not enough. That I think that this knowledge is necessary, this very book which I write is a proof.

I am afraid that there is a great lack of this knowledge, even of the intelligent understanding of the way of grace. I am afraid that many have very imperfect conceptions of what grace is, and how it redeems the sinner: of what the blotting out of transgressions, and the washing away of unrighteousness, and the cleansing of sin is; of what the terrible nature of sin is, and very much more that is taught in this glorious Psalm. And I consider it of the utmost importance that concerning these points clear convictions should be obtained. For without clear knowledge faith cannot be clear and powerful and joyful. 'Understandest thou what thou readest?' was the first question of the preacher of the gospel: 'Believest thou with all thine heart?' the second. Such an intelligent understanding of the way of grace is of great value.

But this is not enough. It is possible that one may have a well-nigh perfect knowledge of God's word and yet be lost. And when we have clear insight into the way of the truth of God, we run just as much risk of resting content with it. When one who is indifferent begins to be earnest, and then obtains an insight into God's wonderful redemption, such knowledge sometimes yields him great joy. When he begins to obtain some right conception of the plan of redemption in Christ, of His atonement, of God's righteousness, of the new birth, he sees such a suitability and glory in it all that he is filled with admiration and gladness. But then he runs great risk of resting in this. He feels a very great

difference in himself in comparison with the time when he remained in indifference or in ignorance. A great change has taken place in him, and yet it may be that he has not yet obtained an inward experiential spiritual knowledge of redemption. On this account, when an anxious soul is seeking to understand the way of grace in this Psalm, it becomes a matter of very much importance that he should feel deeply his dependence upon God; that at every verse and every word he should lift up the prayer: 'Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation'; that he should continually use, for example, the prayers of Ps. xxv. and Ps. cxix. in order to obtain the heavenly divine instruction of the Spirit in this hidden wisdom. O thou who art longing for salvation, it is an amazing thought that one may be occupied with divine truths and yet be lost after all. Perhaps someone thinks that such a representation is sufficient to make one altogether dispirited. It would indeed be so were it not that we can say in this prayer: 'In the hidden parts *Thou shalt make me* to know wisdom.' God gives the wisdom. This is our only security, and that is the only answer that we can give to the question: How do we know if we have a right spiritual knowledge of grace? The Lord can and will make you assured of this. Conversion, faith, is not a work that you must do, and on which you can look back and say, 'That is well done.' No: the innermost essence of conversion and faith consists in coming *to God*

in surrender *to God*, in receiving *from God* the *living God*, grace to be worked out by Him, in being washed and purified from sin by Him. And just at this point is there in the religion of many so much defect. They do not know that in grace the principal element is that we must come into contact with the living God, and must experience the power of the Almighty.

O soul longing for salvation, true religion is a divine and spiritual thing. The whole work from beginning to end is a wonderful work of the holy God in the soul. The first desire for grace, spiritual wisdom, the growing sense of sin, faith in the blood of Jesus, the renewing of the Holy Spirit—everything is wrought by God in the soul. O let it be a matter of deep earnestness with you. If you are seeking to walk in the way of grace after the footsteps of David in this Psalm, go to God with every verse, and in every experience of perplexity cast yourself upon God and ask of Him that step by step and word by word He would fulfil in you this promise: 'In the hidden parts Thou shalt make me to know wisdom.'

III.

The Prayer for Forgiveness.

7. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

8. *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.*

9. *Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.*

'Do Thou with hyssop sprinkle me,
I shall be cleansed so;
Yea, wash Thou me, and then I shall
be whiter than the snow.

Of gladness and of joyfulness
make me to hear the voice:
That so these very bones which Thou
hast broken may rejoice.'

—SCOTTISH PSALTER.

Twelfth Day

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.'—Ver. 7*a*.

DAVID has confessed his sins. Now follows the prayer for redemption which he desires from grace. He would fain have before all else the forgiveness of his sins.

In order to understand this verse, we must look back to the nineteenth chapter of the Book of Numbers. There we find this word 'purify' as many as seven times, and the ceremony of cleansing is described with the utmost detail. It was demanded in this way. Whenever anyone had touched a dead body, he was reckoned unclean. Death was the punishment and the curse of sin, and on this account every member of the people of Israel who had touched a dead body must be reckoned as unclean. He was then also no longer at liberty to come to the tabernacle, in order that he might thus exhibit in an external fashion how fellowship with sin and death separate us from God.

Only after he had been purified and washed could he be again clean. And this is described to us in that chapter. A red heifer had to be burned, and its ashes kept in store. If anyone had rendered himself unclean, then the ashes had to be put in water; a bunch of hyssop had to be dipped in it, and the unclean person sprinkled with it. After he had washed himself with water, he would be once more clean. He must thus be purified with hyssop. In the Epistle to the Hebrews this ceremony is definitely mentioned as a type of purification by the blood of Jesus. We read there (ch. ix. 13, 14): 'For if the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean cleanseth them to the purity of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?'

David knew already that in this ceremony a spiritual purification was presented, and he prayed that God might fulfil it in him. He felt that his sin had brought him under the power of death, and that he was unprepared to serve the living God until he was first cleansed by God Himself. The light of the New Testament, and especially this word from the Epistle to the Hebrews, shows us that this purification can take place only by the blood of Christ. Let us reflect what David's prayer, thus illumined by the word of God, can teach us.

And it teaches us, first of all, *how indispensable this cleansing is.* It stands written twice over in

that chapter (Num. xix. 13, 20): 'Whoever is unclean and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from the midst of the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the Lord.' God is an holy God; nothing that is stained with sin can stand before Him. He who had but touched the dead body might not enter into His temple. By this external strictness under the old covenant is represented the impossibilty of any fellowship betwixt God and sin. He who remains in impurity is condemned to death. If he would please God and draw near to God, he must suffer himself to be purged with hyssop. God Himself had in a wonderful way prepared a sacrifice, and water for cleansing, and there was no alternative but to be purified with hyssop or be cast out from the congregation of the Lord. In the New Testament it is not otherwise. God is the holy One. Sin cannot have fellowship with Him. God is the living God. Death may not draw near to Him; our sins are many, and we cannot blot them out. Even our apparently good works are but dead works. They bear in themselves the tokens of sin and of the death of the corrupt nature out of which they spring. He that is not yet purified in the way appointed by God, through the sacrifice commanded by God, shall be cut off from the congregation. O my reader, pray understand this, nothing that you can do, no change or reformation, can restore to you access to God. One thing is needful. You must be cleansed, and that by God Himself; other-

wise you shall not enter into His heaven. By all the terror inspired by the thought of being cast out for ever, I pray you, let this prayer of David become your own: 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.'

And David's prayer teaches us further *that this purifying is to be found.* The Spirit of God taught David to pray thus in harmony with what the types of the temple service taught. The New Testament says to us: 'How much more shall the blood of Christ cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.' Yes: the blood of Christ: that can cleanse us. The red heifer was killed and burned, and its blood was sprinkled upon the tabernacle. The water of purifying made from the ashes of this sacrifice could cleanse no one. Jesus is the Perfect Sacrifice. He died for our sins. He has overcome the power of sin and of death, and brought it to nought. He has entered with His blood into the Holy Place. O soul, be assured that you also may be indeed purified and cleansed. Draw near to God with this humble prayer, that He would purge you, that He Himself would sprinkle you with this blood, and cause you to experience the power of it. He will do it. The blood of Jesus will cleanse you from all sin. If in faith, in the grace of Jesus, you seek to appropriate His blood, and on the ground of the word endeavour to hold fast the thought: *that* blood is also for me, the Spirit of God will give you the quiet assurance that God Himself has taken away all your unright-

eousness from you. Go to the fountain of Jesus' blood: present yourself there to God, praying, watching, trusting. To this faith it will surely be granted; and you shall know that you are clean.

'I hold my Saviour dear,
For He makes me now appear,
By His Word and Spirit clean
From every stain of sin.'

Yes: you shall know that you are pure; not that your heart is so holy that you cannot any more commit sin, but so purified by the blood that sin is no more reckoned to you, and you yourself no more burdened with it; and so purified by the Spirit which is communicated with the blood, that you have a clean heart in which the law of God is written, and in which it lives. Thus did Jesus speak to His disciples: 'He that is washed has need only to wash his feet. He is clean every whit, and ye are clean.'

Reader, I pray you, let this prayer of David become your own: '*Purge me, and I shall be clean.*' And the more earnestly you with your eye upon Jesus express that first word: '*Purge me,*' the more powerfully shall the Spirit of God also apply to you that second word: '*I shall be clean.*'

Thirteenth Day

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.'—Ver. 7*b*.

THE prayer to be washed, which we have already had in ver. 2, is once more repeated, but this time with an explanation of much importance added to it. He says to the Lord, what he believes the wonderful power of that washing shall be: 'Wash me, and *I shall be whiter than snow.*' The prayer for grace and forgiveness is found in very many, but they do not know what the answer is which they ought to expect. They do not believe that the prayer will be so gloriously heard, and that we shall be able to draw near to God with the blessed certitude of being whiter than snow.

In order to understand this prayer thoroughly, it must first of all be observed that this word, 'Whiter than snow,' does not have reference to the inward renewal and purifying of the heart. David does not say that when he is washed he will then be perfect, and commit sin no more. One who has

been washed clean may always again fall into the mire and become soiled. Grace gives an inward purity; only it does not come at once and in perfect form, but gradually and step by step. Of this David speaks later on when he prays for a clean heart. But what he here speaks of is that entire freedom from guilt which everyone receives with the forgiveness of sins. When God forgives sins, He forgives at once and perfectly; and at that moment when God forgives sins the soul is in His eyes and according to His holy law without a spot, and entirely clean. As the Lord Jesus said to Peter: 'He that is washed is clean every whit'; yea, 'whiter than snow.'

'*Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*' Would that everyone of us might make this whole prayer with all earnestness his own. The arguments that should urge you to this step are great and strong. *Nothing less than this can keep you.* You may perhaps think that this prayer of David is too high. 'So much I dare not ask for or expect, I shall be content with less.' My friend, with less you are not satisfied; with everything that is less you will be lost. We have said before that the law of God stands at the gate of heaven and guards the entrance to it. It lets no one within who is not '*whiter than snow.*' That is the holiness of God and the perfection of the angels, and anything that is less clean and less holy is not admitted into heaven. If there is one single stain in you the law will reject you. God will cast you out. The

angels will cast you out. All heaven will cast you out. In the great day of judgment and of wrath, when the justice of God shall flash out against everything on which the least stain of sin is, to consume it in the flame of fire—O, then, nothing shall stand before a holy God that is not 'whiter than snow.'

But hear further: '*nothing less is offered to you.* If you had to take in hand the purifying of yourselves to this extent, you might well despair. God Himself says: 'For though thou wash thee with lye, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me.' But instead of this, all that is necessary for your salvation God Himself has prepared. When God forgives, He forgives perfectly. 'As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.' The washing of the soul is God's work, an act of God's holy and all-prevailing grace. He is in a position to make it 'whiter than snow.' It is the blood of Jesus in which we are washed. The power of divine holiness, which is to be found in that precious atoning blood, has the power to make whiter than snow. In other words, the guilt-annulling atonement of Jesus Christ is perfect; His righteousness is perfect; His merit is infinite. If His righteousness be imputed to me, I obtain it perfect and entire. If I have part in the Lord Jesus, my Surety, then I have Him wholly and altogether. Christ is not divided. I am in Him, in which case I have His full righteousness, or I am not in Him, and have no part in it. When Jesus bore the curse with us,

it was not imputed to Him and laid upon Him according to the measure of His merit and worthiness, but *according to ours.* Now that we are endowed with grace along with Jesus before God, His righteousness is bestowed upon us, not according to the measure of our merit, but *according to that of Jesus.* It was an act of the divine righteousness that Jesus came in our nature, and to take upon Himself our full curse. It is in like manner an act of the righteousness of God that we come to Him in Jesus to appropriate to ourselves the complete righteousness of Jesus. Jesus is treated as identified with us, and, on this ground, as one upon whom the curse must rest. He who believes is one with Jesus, is treated as such, is accepted in Him, is 'whiter than snow.' God sees us in Christ. Our sins are entirely and completely forgiven: we are altogether acceptable to Him. He fulfils to us the word: 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' Therefore let everyone pray: 'Wash me, and *I shall be whiter than snow.*' It is nothing less than this that God has offered to us.

Nothing less than this can bring you full peace. Alas! how many are there who are seeking a ground of peace with God in their own activity and endeavours and experiences. But they cannot find stable, full peace, the peace which Jesus gives, and passeth all understanding. Only when we can utter by faith that word: 'I shall be clean,' 'I shall be whiter than snow,' do we know what is meant by

saying: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered'; and what is meant by singing: 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgiveth all thine iniquities.' Then a disquieted conscience obtains peace, full peace even in view of God and of sin, in view of the law and the curse, in view of death and of judgment: because the blood of Jesus makes 'whiter than snow.' The soul rejoices with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

Beloved reader, *nothing less than this must be your desire.* What I ask you to do is to lay aside your own prayers and your own thoughts about that which God is to do for you, and to learn to pray as the Holy Spirit taught David: 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' Take these words into your lips; lay them up in your heart; utter them continually before God in prayer; make them a continual aspiration. You shall obtain a richer blessing than your prayers have perhaps brought you for years. These words will be to you a preparation for the gladness of that song of redemption which may be already sung here upon earth: 'Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood; and made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father: to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.'

Beloved reader, *let your faith now really receive this blessing.* In Christ this grace is offered to you. Believe that through Him this goodness is prepared

for you. Believe in Him, and you shall not only ask with confidence, but firmly believe God is doing it: He washes me, and I am whiter than snow. O draw near to Him, and take the blessing out of His hand.

Fourteenth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.'—Ver. 8.

DAVID does not simply long for forgiveness. He desires still more. He will also have joy, gladness, and exultation. This is to him a portion of the grace which he entreats. If this grace is to be full and free, then he expects that it will, in truth, fill his heart with gladness.

There are many souls anxious about salvation that do not understand this. They think that it is too great and too large a blessing to desire from God, that He should cause such unworthy ones deep joy. They would be content to go bowed and depressed all their days, if they could but cherish the humble hope of one day coming into heaven. To ask for joy and gladness upon earth as well, is a thing of which they consider they are not worthy, and it is not fitting for them to expect it. And they think that this is humility. Alas!

no: they only desire always to measure grace in some sort according to their own merits, and then it is not real grace any more.

David exemplifies how we are to know better the God with whom we have to do, and how to cherish higher thoughts of the riches of grace. He knows that when God forgives, He forgives completely; but when He receives anyone again, He receives him with His whole heart. The Lord does not desire that there should be any cloud resting betwixt Him and the believing soul; He desires that the soul should know that it is restored completely to His favour, as completely as if it had never committed sin, and that it may now rejoice with confidence in the forgiving love of God. This David knew; and therefore although he had fallen amazingly low, when he asked for grace, he is not afraid to ask for entire restoration to the love of God, and for the blessed experience of it. 'Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.'

O that every penitent and anxious soul that uses this Psalm may learn to understand that he is entitled to ask for nothing less, that it is proper for him to be content with nothing less, than joy and gladness. God desires this on the part of His people: 'Rejoice in the Lord: and again I say unto you, Rejoice.' The Lord Jesus desires it also: 'These things have I spoken unto you that My joy may abide in you, and that your joy may be full.' The nature of the case, the glory of the reward, the

love and beneficence of God, all entitle us to expect that forgiveness shall impart joy.

And if we would understand what this joy and gladness consists in, an explanation is readily given: just in receiving what he had prayed for, the cleansing of his sins. Yes: it was from the forgiveness of his sins that he expected such gladness. It was always the sense of his sin that had grieved and pained him so terrribly; and so long as he had no certitude concerning this blessing, he could have no peace. But when he only knew that God was reconciled to him, that his transgressions were blotted out of God's book, that he was washed whiter than snow, and thus restored to the favour of God, it was no wonder that he expected that his heart should be filled with joy and gladness. It was thus that he came to pray: 'By the word of forgiveness spoken to my soul, cause me to hear joy and gladness.'

How different is such an attitude from that of those who pray for a short time, and then once again seek their joy in the world, because they know nothing of the joy of God; or of those who pray for forgiveness, and yet do not believe that this blessing can fill them with joy; who seek for the fountain of joy only in themselves, in some wonderful change of heart or holiness in their life. O souls, pray learn from David that at the very moment that you come believing to the blood of Jesus to receive forgiveness, you may be filled with the joy of God: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.' To the

sinner, Jesus says: 'Be of good cheer; go in peace: your sins are forgiven you.'

But whence comes it, then, that so many never arrive at this gladness? To me it seems that this verse of our Psalm points out a true reason. When David says: 'That the bones *which Thou hast broken* may rejoice,' he reminds us how terrible his conviction of sin was. God had bruised him; that is, he felt that God was his enemy, that the wrath of God was upon him, and that he could not withstand God, nor even stand before Him. The curse of God's law struck him down, and he lay bruised in the dust. The dread reality of sin, the astonishing nature and certainty of God's wrath, bruised him to such an extent that there was no healing of him; and now nothing can possibly comfort him, unless he is to receive complete forgiveness and complete restoration. If he were not certain of this, if there was to be the least doubt upon this point, he could rest no more. Was God's forgiveness a reality for him? He desired to be assured of this by hearing God's voice of joy and gladness.

And it seems to me that just here is found lurking the cause why so many never come to the joy of God, and never, indeed, once earnestly long for it. They have never yet truly felt their sins. They cannot yet speak to God of 'the bones which Thou hast broken.' They know that they are sinners; but the conviction is a thing simply of the understanding. The fear of the Lord is never upon them. They have never yet been roused by

the sense of God's wrath. They do not feel that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. The Spirit has not convinced them of sin. They have never yet learned to cry out: 'Woe is me, I am undone,' and therefore they feel so little need of joy, and of the certainty of God's forgiving love.

O Lord, that Thou wouldest pour forth Thy Holy Spirit, that many might know their sins and feel real anxiety of soul. Would that the law might bruise them, that the curse might terrify them, that the cross might break them down, so that they should find no rest until they find forgiveness and the joy of God in the blood of the cross.

Fifteenth Day

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Hide Thy face from my sins.'—Ver. 9*a*.

HERE we have a new expression for that which David desired the grace of God to do for him. He expects that God will hide His face from his sin, and not see it any more. This also was one aim of the prayer: 'Have mercy upon me, O God.' This blessing is in entire agreement with what the word of God teaches us. So long as our sins are not forgiven, they are represented as standing before the face of God in order to accuse us. He hears the accusation which they bring in against us. He looks upon them in all their heinousness as a transgression of His law, and they awake His wrath and displeasure. So it is said (Ps. xc. 8): '*Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance*'; and again (Jer. ii. 22) 'For though thou wash thee with lye, and take thee much soap, *yet thine iniquity is marked before Me,* saith the Lord God.' In the bitter experience

of his anxious soul this thought had become with David a terrible truth. He feels not only what he had confessed (ver. 3): 'My sin is *ever before me*,' but what was more terrible, that his sin was *ever before God*. He saw his sins himself, and he was terrified; but he also says (ver. 4) that God saw them. Every sin that he had committed was there before the face of God. God grant that everyone of my readers may feel this. Then perhaps he may learn to understand the glory of David's prayer. He will then feel that every sin as soon as it is committed, goes to swell the list of his accusers before the face of God; that whenever a sin is once committed, it is no longer in the power of man; he can no more recall it or annul it; no repentance or tears, no promise of new obedience, can cover it or take it away. Only an act of God, a wonderful act of God's free grace, can give the soul the blessed certainty: my sin is no more before God's face.

And what is this act of God? In the verse we have as our text, David names it: 'Hide Thy face from my sin.' To hide the face from anything, means not to see it; and this prayer of David is just according to what is elsewhere said; as, for example (Num. xxiii. 21): 'He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel.' So also Hezekiah prays (Isa. xxxviii. 17): 'But Thou hast, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption; for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.' So also speaks the prophet Micah (ch. vii. 19): 'He will turn again, and will

have compassion for us. He will tread our iniquities under foot, and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.' And in like manner speaks the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah: 'In those days, saith the Lord, shall the unrighteousness of Israel be sought for, but it shall not be found; for I shall forgive it to all those whom I shall cause to remain.' These words of Scripture give us to understand what the forgiveness of God is. He casts our sins behind His back: He casts them into the depths of the sea, so that they can no more be found: He turns away His face from them, and sees them no more.

O this is blessedness: to know that our sins are forgiven. Christ has brought them to nought. Our sins can no more stand up against us. The face of God averted from our sins is turned toward us in favour. God no longer sees our sin in wrath, but He looks upon us in mercy. This is nothing different from what in the New Testament is called Justification. When the sinner receives acquittal from his sins, then he is indeed a justified soul in the eyes of God. His former sins are no more to be found. God has hid His face from them; and when the holy Judge no longer beholds them, then may the acquitted soul rejoice in the assurance of His favour and love.

At this point, however, someone may ask: How can it be that the omniscient and faithful God, who knows my sins, nevertheless shuts His eyes to them, and takes no further cognisance of them? He is always the perfectly righteous One; and *that He should look upon sin and connive at it,* is once and for all im-

possible. But when God averts His eyes from your sins, hides His face from your sins, casts your sins behind His back, He does this because through Jesus satisfaction for them has been found. When he receives from the Great Surety the assurance that you belong to Him, that you have part in the annulling of guilt by His blood, then God has no longer to deal with your sins; they have been put away. And then it is just His righteousness which demands that He should no more remember your sins, but hide His face from your sins. So long as your sins are before Him, God must behold them; but when they are imputed to Jesus, with the satisfaction of the Lord Jesus as your Surety imputed to you, God may not look upon them any more. They have been accounted for and put away.

Thus also we learn in what spirit you are to make this prayer of David your own: 'Hide Thy face from my sins.' Look upon the Lord Jesus as He has borne your sins on the cross, and annulled the guilt of them. Look upon the Lord Jesus with the complete atonement which He has wrought out as offered to you by God. Look upon Him as really given for you by God in order that you may receive Him with confidence and come to God in Him. Yes: look upon Him through whom myriads have received the sentence of acquittal as also waiting for you. Look upon Him until your faith becomes living, and you can say: Jesus is also for me: God hides His face from my sins: 'Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.'

Reader, this is a matter of great concern—of amazing interest. Your sins are all before the face of God. They cry out for vengeance. Day and night their cry ascends to God: 'This sinner has provoked Thee: He is worthy of the curse: O holy God, hide not Thy face from his sins.' And the law of God supports their entreaty: 'O holy God, they have transgressed Thy law: hide not Thy face from their sins.' And woe to the sinner who must experience that. For this reason, reader, let your prayer go up on the other hand to God: 'Hide Thy face from my sin.' Plead the promise of God and the blood of Jesus. Ask Jesus to become your intercessor. You shall experience that God hears this prayer; that the blood of Jesus has great power; and that He is in a position to cover your sins and to take them away from before God.

Sixteenth Day

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'And blot out all mine iniquities.'—Ver. 9*b*.

THIS prayer is heard here for the second time. It was the first word that David made use of after he had begun to pray for mercy, in order to say what he desired from this mercy. He has already expressed his desires by other different expressions, such as, 'Wash me,' 'Cleanse me' (ver. 2); 'Purge me, Wash me' (ver. 7); 'Cause me to hear joy and gladness' (ver. 8); 'Hide Thy face from my sin' (ver. 9); he now once more gathers all together in the deeply significant word: 'Blot out all mine iniquities.'

For the explanation of this word, we have to refer to that which has already been said in ver. 1. It is of great importance for us to make use of this word for reflecting upon the preceding portion of the Psalm, and for testing ourselves as to whether we have any real knowledge of it. It is of the more interest to us because this is the last

time that this point is referred to in the Psalm. In the three following verses David asks for inward renewing of his heart by the Spirit of God, and from ver. 13 to the end of the Psalm he speaks of the fruits of the thanksgiving which God's redemption is to bring forth. But before he proceeds to this, he repeats once again the prayer: 'Blot out all mine iniquities.' In this way he shows us that he was in dead earnest about this matter. He knows that it is the root and the beginning of all the rest; that if there is no clear understanding betwixt God and the sinner with respect to the forgiveness of sins, there can be no further question about a new life. And therefore I also will deal with you, my beloved friend, on this matter with all earnestness, with all definiteness, and with all sincerity. I desire to put to you some questions concerning this all-important matter.

Do you thoroughly understand what the forgiveness of sins—*the blotting out of iniquities*—is? Pray, do not imagine that this question is needless. I know many earnest Christians who do not thoroughly understand this point. It will do us no harm once again to meditate upon this—the foundation of our redemption. Do you understand that the blotting out of all his iniquities is *the first blessing* which God desires to bestow upon the sinner who longs to be saved? Do you understand that God is prepared to bestow it at once, without further delay or waiting, on everyone who receives

it trustfully? He causes it to be offered to us continually. Do you understand that he who simply from the heart appropriates the offered Saviour with His blood, receives it for himself as a thing which comes to him in virtue of God's gift and offer, and that along with Jesus he actually receives, *by faith, the blotting out of his sins*? And do you know, further, that by this faith wherewith he receives Jesus on God's word he can certainly know that his sins are really blotted out of God's Book; because the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Faith, bears witness to him of this forgiveness? And do you understand that this blotting out is perfect and complete, or that by reason of it the soul appears before God '*whiter than snow*,' and can look up to God as a God who is no longer angry with it? Do you understand all this, or is it still to you all half uncertain? And do you feel, when we speak of these things, as one who is still groping in the dark? I beseech you, see that you come to a clear understanding of these points; for, my friend, your eternal salvation is concerned with it.

And then I desire to ask further: *Are you really seeking for forgiveness and the blotting out of your iniquities*? I do not ask if you know that you need to be saved, if you are sometimes disquieted, if you sometimes pray, or if you perhaps pray every day: 'Forgive us our sins.' No, my friend, I ask you something more than this. I ask if in the presence of God, the Searcher of hearts, you can

say that you are known to Him (for He has a book for the names of all true seekers after Him) as one who really seeks for forgiveness. Can God testify concerning you that you are hungering and thirsting for it? Can you say that day by day you are seeking and striving for this grace as a thing that is indispensable? Have you, to obtain this forgiveness, abandoned sin, willingly given up the world? And are you now with earnest entreaties, even at unusual times (for true seeking will hardly limit itself to some fixed hours), casting yourself before God in order to entreat it from Him, as the one blessing which He has to bestow upon you? Yes: are you really seeking it in the house of prayer, in God's word, in the prayer of your own closet, as the one thing for which you are willing to count everything but loss? It is worthy of being thus sought for. God desires that it should be thus sought for; and only he who thus seeks for it shall obtain it.

Are you really seeking for it in this fashion?

I have still another question. If you have not hitherto been seeking for this blotting out of your iniquities, or have only begun desiring to seek for it, then this question does not concern you. But if you can say that you have been seeking for it, then I ask you: Have you indeed found it? Are your sins forgiven? Do you know that, as surely and really as the guilt of your sin was upon you, so you are now really clean in God's sight, because He has blotted out all your iniquities. I know that

many a one shrinks from these questions, but it is just on that account that I put them. When David had prayed for mercy, he was not content with indefinite ideas about the goodness of God. No: he knew what this goodness desired to do for him. He expected that it would do something real for him. He prays for the blotting out of his iniquities with the expectation of obtaining an answer to that prayer, and in the hope that thereafter the joy and the power of a new life would be fulfilled in him; as he has so often sung of it in later Psalms, for example, in Ps. ciii.: 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgiveth all thine iniquities.' Therefore I ask you, my worthy reader, are your iniquities all blotted out? O, if this is not yet the case, then you are not yet where you ought to be. You do not yet have any part in God's salvation, and thus I cry to you: 'Haste thee to God.' Do not longer remain standing afar off. Pray, believe. This blessing is really to be found. This blessing is also for me: sin can be put away. Let your whole soul become fixed upon this one aim—the blotting out of sin. Without this blessing there is no salvation. God alone can give it. God desires to give it. God will give it. Yes: He will perform this divine deed for you. He will take away all your sins. Only let this prayer be heard from the depths of your heart: 'Blot out all mine iniquities.' Only let faith look upon Christ. The Son of God can save sinners. He that believes in Him shall not be ashamed.

IV.

The Prayer for Renewal.

10. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

11. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.

12. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with a free spirit.

'All mine iniquities blot out,
Thy face hide from my sin.
Create a clean heart, Lord, renew
a right sp'rit me within.

Cast me not from Thy sight, nor take
Thy Holy Sp'rit away.
Restore me Thy salvation's joy;
with Thy free Sp'rit me stay.'

—SCOTTISH PSALTER

Seventeenth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Create in me a clean heart, O God.'—Ver. 10*a*.

IN a preceding verse David had prayed: 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.' There we said that a man becomes clean when he is sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, and is thus purged, acquitted from his sin. In this verse David again prays to be made clean; but the cleanness is to come in another fashion. He prays that the Lord may *create* within him a *clean* heart, that is, make a new heart for him that is clean by His divine power. He feels that there are two ways in which the unclean can become clean before God. The one is when he is washed and cleansed from his guilt in the blood of Jesus, judicially acquitted. The other, when he is renewed and inwardly changed, and receives a new and clean heart in place of the old and unclean. Reader, if you would understand the way of salvation, the work of grace, and the prayer for grace aright, see to it

that you have clear thoughts about this twofold purity.

The first is the portion of the soul when it becomes acquitted in virtue of the blood of Jesus. By the acquittal and forgiveness of God, whereby God casts sin behind His back, a man is entirely freed from the guilt that is resting upon him, and thus he is judicially clean; that is to say, I have fulfilled the demands of the law; I have paid my guilt, either by myself or by another as surety. In that case the law has naturally nothing more to demand from me. I stand in its eye guiltless and clean. The law always inquires only about what I have done and what I have been, not as to what I still am or as to what I am yet to do. And thus it may be that a judge on earth may acquit or pronounce clean without implying that the heart of the acquitted man is clean, or that he is beyond the possibility of again committing the very same sin. In like manner, the sinner is acquitted and pronounced clean from all the sins which he has committed, without its thereby being implied that his heart is pure from the seeds of future sins. Yea: even though God knows that the heart is inwardly impure so far as sinful disposition is concerned, the sinner is pronounced clean by the law as soon as all the demands of the law are fulfilled. The demands of the law have been fulfilled by the precious Saviour, by His obedience and His suffering, and therefore it is that the appropriation of

Jesus has for its consequence the blessing of being pronounced clean in His blood. This, then, is the purity of which David has spoken in the first half of the Psalm, the complete forgiveness of sins, the being made 'whiter than snow.'

But this purity is not all that he needs. There is a second cleanness, the fruit and the consequence of the first. An earthly judge may acquit a man or pronounce him clean although his heart still continues to cleave to his sins, and he may go from the bench to commit them again. But God does not do this. He acquits the sinner, and pronounces him clean simply and only for Jesus' sake, not taking into consideration the inward condition of his heart. He does not, however, leave him thus. As soon as He acquits him, He begins also the work of inward purification. The very same grace which teaches him to pray for the first purity, the judicial cleansing from the acquittal of the law, teaches him also to desire the second purity, the inward cleansing that comes through the renewing of the Spirit; and therefore it is that David after he had entreated: 'Purge me, and I shall be clean,' 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,' prays here again: 'Create in me (inwardly also) a clean heart, O God.' The one is as indispensable as the other, or rather the two are one. They are but two different ways by which the purity of Jesus comes to man. As soon as a man believes, the righteousness of Christ is wholly reckoned to him, and at once he is on the ground of it welcome to

God as one that is clean: the inward communication of the purity of Jesus to the soul takes place by degrees.

These two are one; but they ought not on this account to be mixed up together. And this confusion takes place too frequently, to the unspeakable loss of poor souls. The one cleanness is a root, the other is a fruit. The one goes first, the other follows after. Observe this particularly. David has first prayed for the one (vers. 8, 9), thereafter he asks for the other. And, pray, never forget, anxious soul, that the first, the cleansing of the blood of Christ, is bestowed before you can inwardly receive the second, and that only he who receives and accepts the first shall have the power to obtain the second.

Reader, let it be your prayer: 'Have mercy upon me, O God; blot out my transgressions; create in me a clean heart.'

We understand now the place which this prayer occupies in this Psalm. It has prepared us to feel its meaning and its power all the better. May God teach us to offer up this prayer with deep earnestness and with our whole heart.

The desire of the true suppliant must, above all things, go forth towards inward purity. David is not content with praying simply for the forgiveness of his transgressions. No: he had felt that his whole nature was inwardly corrupt. He desires also to be inwardly purified. He will not be content simply with acquittal from merited punish-

ment. With this, alas! many are quite content. No: he desires to be free also from the power and indwelling of sin. He desires to be holy, and to commit sin no more. He feels that only according to the measure of his holiness can he enjoy God: for, 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.' But, thou who art seeking for salvation, let nothing less than this be your desire.

This clean heart must also be your expectation. God the Creator is also God the Renewer. He can do this. As the work of the first creation was not completed at once, but step by step, so also will it be with the renewal. The holy God can perform this work. He can make the unclean heart clean. It is not too wonderful for Him. This is what grace will do for you. Let your sure expectation reach out to this blessing. When you pray for forgiveness, let it only be as a step to the way to become holy. God is pure, God is holy, and no prayer will be more welcome to Him than that He should make you holy also. 'Create in me a clean heart, O God.'

Eighteenth Day

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'And renew a steadfast spirit within me.'—Ver. 10*b*.

When God creates a clean heart, then the man is born again. He is indeed a new creature. He has received the new life, the love of God.

It is nevertheless not enough that a man should receive the new life. It must grow and be strengthened. A weak child is really a living human creature, and yet much remains which has to be done to him in order to preserve and nourish and lead that life until he comes to the full stature of a man. A weak child can stand and run; but he must also learn to stand fast, and his goings must also be established.

And this is what David here now prays for. He desires, not only the new life with the clean heart, but also *a steadfast spirit*. That new life and that purity of heart are at the outset weak and tender. Very much has yet to be done in order to make it grow. The creation of God was not completed in

one day: so also in the creation of a clean heart, time is needed before everything is finished, and man enters upon his Sabbath, his divine rest. And because in the new creation, after God has implanted the first principle of life, man must willingly co-operate with God, so it is necessary that he should with a steadfast spirit surrender himself to the Lord and His work. The beginning of the new creation does not depend upon a steadfast spirit, but certainly the progress of it does, and also the greater or less glory with which the creation shall be brought to completion.

Great loss may be incurred by separating these two prayers from one another. They are inwardly bound up with one another. He who is content when he thinks he has received a new heart, and does not then also strive with a steadfast spirit and with a resolute will to guard what he has received, and does not endeavour to use and to increase what God has bestowed upon him, will speedily have to mourn that the joy of the clean heart has become lost. He who, on the other hand, works and prays for this steadfast spirit, shall have gloriously manifested within him by this means purity of heart and the splendour of the new creation, the full certitude and power of his heavenly birth.

We must also pray that God would give to us *a steadfast spirit.* Steadfast is the opposite of weak, uncertain, changeable, variable. What stands fast cannot be moved or overthrown. Such a spirit must be asked for from God in prayer. At the

same time we must nevertheless also observe in what ways God works and bestows this blessing.

And this is the first thing that strikes us: '*Faith is a sure foundation.*' He who stands upon it shall not be moved. Therefore we read (Ps. cxii. 8) of the righteous man: 'His heart is established, trusting in the Lord'; and therefore Peter writes (1 Pet. v. 9), 'steadfast in your faith,' and Paul (Col. i. 23), 'continue in the faith grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel.' In Hebrew the word 'believe' comes from a word which means *to be steadfast, to stand fast*; and the word 'believe' just means *to continue steadfast.* Since God Himself is a steadfast Rock, the foundation of all certitude and steadfastness, it must be by faith or cleaving fast to God that man can become steadfast. If you would know what you ask of God when you pray for a steadfast spirit, this is the answer: the more that you cleave to God and commit yourself to His word and counsel, the more steadfast shall you stand. And if you would know how God will bestow this steadfast spirit upon you, this is the answer: by the word. Let the word of God be your food: let it be inwardly assimilated and appropriated by you; let it penetrate you wholly; let it be flesh and blood to your spirit. Strive by it to think what God thinks, to will what God wills, in everything to be of the same mind that God is, to grow by His word in you, to have it dwelling in you; then you shall be established. In all your wishes and expec-

tations, in all your desires and efforts, let what God has said be your rule, and a steadfast spirit will be renewed in you. If the word of God is thus the rock of your confidence, you will be just as little moved as there is variableness or shadow of turning with God.

By what means, pray, was it that Abraham became strong in the faith in the midst of so many severe trials? The root of his steadfastness was the promise of God. And whence was it, too, that Caleb and Joshua stood so firmly in the midst of the hundreds of thousands of Israel? They held fast by the word of God. And how was it so also with many other believers? The answer is simple: 'They that trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever' (Ps. cxxv. 1). It is God found in His word in whom the spirit obtains its steadfastness and strength.

And if you would know further how a steadfast spirit will manifest itself, the answer is not difficult: *in the resoluteness of a steadfast will exercising dominion over the spirit and the walk.* The great defect of many believers, when they have the new heart, is that they do not set themselves with a steadfast and resolute choice to cast out sin and do the will of God. They do not actually obey the dictates of their conscience, the inward voice of the Spirit and the word: they do not unreservedly surrender themselves actually to do the will of God as soon as they know it. It is fitting surely that there should be in every believer the holy purpose

of doing the will of God without delay as soon as it is known. On this point may no uncertainty prevail: for there are many double-hearted souls who are unstable in all their ways. A divided heart makes them continually waver.

For all such it is necessary to remember that along with the new heart and along with a sense of sin and good desire, there must also be a steadfast spirit which will be resolute, and which will set itself positively to fulfil all the commands of God. This steadfast spirit must be made a matter of much prayer: 'Renew a steadfast spirit within me'; and at the same time of much exercise in the strife against sin. He who seeks for it in prayer shall certainly become partaker of it, and he shall be able to join in David's song of deliverance (Ps. xl. 2)—

> 'He took me from a fearful pit,
> And from the miry clay,
> And on a rock He set my feet,
> Establishing my way.'

Reader, do not forget it. In the prayer for grace, in the life of grace, the steadfast spirit must have a place. The young tree must not only be planted, but must become deeply rooted, otherwise it can bear no fruit. Let it therefore be a continual prayer with you: 'Make my footsteps steadfast in Thy word, and let'—observe what shall be the fruit of this—and 'let not any iniquity have dominion over me.'

Nineteenth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Cast me not away from Thy presence.'—Ver. 11*a*.

DAVID proceeds in his prayer to entreat the blessings of the new life of grace, and teaches us also by the Holy Spirit what we may expect in that life and from this grace. The clean heart and the steadfast spirit to act according to its dictates, these are great blessings. But there is still something more which he desires, and that is *the light of God's countenance.* He prays for the blessed experience whereby the soul always walks in the presence of God as its friend, and in the consciousness that He looks down upon it in favour and love.

The promise of this blessing in the word of God is very clear. It is frequently and expressly named as one of the privileges of God's children. For example (Ps. lxxxix. 15): 'Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound. They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance.' It cannot,

indeed, be otherwise. What is the greatest joy of a child on earth? It is when father or mother looks down upon it with good pleasure. Do we not often see that the little child plays quiet and content when it is simply with its mother in the room? The mother is busy and the child is busy; but the light of its mother's countenance, the feeling that she is near, is the joy of the child. And should God not bestow this privilege upon those who receive from Him the name and the rights of children? Yes: He desires that in this world they should always move about before His face, in the light of His eye, and with the assurance and experience of His love.

The value of this blessing may be easily understood. What a source of heavenly joy must it be to walk in the land of the living before the face of the Lord. What a joy to do all our work and to carry on our conflict as at the feet of our Father, knowing this: 'He looks down upon me with good pleasure.' To be able to look up in every difficulty and in the midst of severe conflict, and once again to refresh myself with a glance at Him and to be encouraged by His divine friendship,—what a power does it not give in conflict; what a comfort in sorrow.

And do you ask, perhaps, how this blessing can be enjoyed? To this also the answer is not difficult. The child does not just need to be always looking to its mother to enjoy the light of her countenance. The child is busy with its play or

its work, and yet it immediately observes when its mother goes out. In the midst of all its working and playing, it has always the hidden sense of her nearness. And just thus it may be with the true Christian. He can attain to being so closely knit to his God that he cannot miss His presence, and that in the midst of all the severe activities of his calling on earth, there may always remain in his soul the blessed feeling: 'My God sees me, and I can look up unto Him.' He works as under the eye of God. *Through this living and ever active faith he beholds the Invisible One, and abides in His light.* And just as on earth one walks and works in the light without just always thinking of it, so there streams around him the spiritual experience of the presence of God as the light of his soul.

O forgiven soul, it is of the uttermost importance for you to understand what a principal part of true spiritual religion this experience makes. Do not forget that the aim God has in view in His grace and your redemption is to restore the broken bond of fellowship and love betwixt Him and the sinner. True religion consists in this: that the soul should find its highest happiness in personal communion with God. Daily unbroken blessed intercourse betwixt God and you is what grace will bestow. Hence it is that you are taught in this prayer for grace that you must pray for this blessing, and strive after it. Every day, and the whole day, you must endeavour to walk in the light of God's countenance. And if you would know how one can get

up to the point of so living that he can enjoy this blessing, this Psalm gives you the answer.

In the *first* place, *walk in a sense of the forgiveness of sins.* Hold fast to the grace which has blotted out your guilt. Every day bring each new sin to the blood of Jesus, in order that you may be anew washed from it. Seek every day a living conviction of the grace which beholds you in the righteousness of Jesus as 'whiter than snow.' Look up to the holy God, who for Jesus' sake pronounced you righteous, and loves you. Without this it will be a severe and heavy conflict, indeed, an impossibility to walk in the light of God's countenance. Remain steadfast in the faith that God is your God and your Father. By this faith alone can you continue in the enjoyment of the light and the love of God.

In the *second* place, *strive earnestly for purity and holiness of heart.* Let the ardour of your soul flame out mightily against all inward impurity and sin. Be careful in watching the indwelling unholiness of your disposition. Remember that you are bound to hate it, as God hates it. Rouse yourself to the thought that you are redeemed to be holy, as God is holy; and let this be your fervent and earnest prayer: 'A clean heart, O my God: a clean heart.' Knowing that the work of the new creation is not complete at once, cry mightily to God that He would accomplish His work in you. A redeemed soul who remains content with what he has, who does not earnestly desire to be holy, cannot walk in the light of God's countenance. His worldly-

mindedness, his carnal uncircumspect disposition, is a cloud which must separate him from God.

And, in the *third* place, to walk before God's countenance, *a steadfast spirit is also necessary.* There must be, not a merely idle wish and a dead desire for the blessing, but steadfast resolve, and a purpose of the heart, the resolute choice of a strong will. Yes: forgiven soul, while you cleave to forgiveness and long earnestly for purity of heart, resolve in God's strength not to rest until you have experienced the blessing of abiding always in the secret enjoyment of God's countenance. Begin every morning with this steadfast purpose, and seal it in believing prayer, that God may keep you from everything that might cast you away from His presence. Let this be indeed your will, because it is also the will of God, and you shall obtain the blessing. You shall experience that grace will also do this for you, namely, will hear your prayer: 'Cast me not away from Thy presence.' And in this blessed experience you shall be able to say with rejoicing (Ps. xxxi. 19): 'O how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou has wrought for them that put their trust in Thee before the sons of men. In the covert of Thy presence shalt Thou hide them. Blessed be the Lord, for He hath shown me His marvellous loving-kindness.'

Twentieth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'And take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.'—Ver. 11*b*.

DAVID has sought a great blessing, a very gracious gift, from God: that he may walk always before His countenance, and in the light of it. He has asked that his whole life on earth and his whole being may be sanctified and illumined by the consciousness that in everything he is carrying out his life, as in the immediate presence of God, under His eye, and in His favour. He has desired that his whole life on earth might be spent in converse with his God in heaven. Glorious life, which grace is prepared to bestow.

And yet there is something that is still higher and more glorious. That I may walk on earth in intercourse with God in heaven is indeed wonderful grace; but that the Most High should come down from His heaven *to dwell in my heart* and consecrate it to be His temple—this surely is the full glory of what grace has destined for us. And this it is that

David now craves in the prayer: 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.' He yearns for the conscious indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

Some may possibly imagine that this petition is not here in the proper place. Nothing is ever wrought in us, save by the Spirit: even the first conviction of sin and the desire to pray for grace must come from Him. Must prayer for the Spirit, then, not *precede* all else? The answer to this question may be given in these considerations. The working of the Holy Spirit in a sinner who has been roused to desire salvation is indeed indispensable, but it is hidden and unconscious. Such a one does not know that the anxiety arising from the conviction of sin and the earnest entreaties for mercy, of which he does not know in the least degree whether they shall be heard or not, are all the results of the Spirit's operations. On the other hand, when, at a later period, he does actually arrive at faith, he has the promise that he shall know the Spirit; that He shall not only work in him, but shall so dwell and establish His presence in him that he shall both know and feel it. This, for example, is the promise held out to those who were awakened on the day of Pentecost, who had already, at the outset, experienced the operation of the Spirit: 'Repent ye, and ye shall (thereafter) receive the gift of the Holy Ghost' (Acts ii. 38); just as the Lord Jesus Himself said to His disciples after they had experienced the first workings of the Spirit: 'If ye love Me, ye will keep My command-

ments; and I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter' (John xiv. 15, 16). Thus the prayer of David here is not a petition for the first operations of the Spirit with a view to conversion. Such prayer is necessary and according to the will of God, and must be offered up. But the petition here looks to that indwelling of the Spirit of God which is the privilege of the believer. He dwells in them, to teach them (John xvi. 13, 14), to seal them and give them the assurance of sonship (Rom. viii. 15, 16), to sanctify and prepare them for heaven (Rom. viii. 11).

It is this lesson, accordingly, that is taught the believer in this petition, namely, to expect not only a clean heart, a steadfast spirit, and the light of God's face, but *also* the indwelling of God's Spirit in the heart. Every believer may have, and ought to experience, this blessing. Without this, he does not live according to the will of God.

The prayer of David makes this clear: 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.' He speaks as one who has already received the Holy Spirit; his petition is that the Spirit may not be taken from him. He feels that, although his former great sin had been forgiven him, he yet always runs the risk of grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit, so that he shall then have to remain without the blessed experience of His work. He knows that, however truly the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of grace who bears up the sinner with great compassion, He is still also the Holy Spirit who is sure to be driven away by the love of sin.

He knows that through worldly-mindedness and worldly anxiety, through lack of thoughtfulness and reverent attention to His workings, injury is done to the Spirit, and He is grieved, with the result that He withdraws His presence from us. The same consequence flows from unfaithfulness in the use of the means of grace, such as the word and prayer, with which His operations are bound up. It is under the sense of this great danger that David prays: 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.'

This petition is a part of the prayer for grace; for it is wholly due to the grace of God if the Holy Spirit is not taken away from believers. As often as injury is done to Him, He is dishonoured and has reason to withdraw, so that, were He not really the Spirit of grace, He would certainly leave us. David hoped and entreated from the grace of God that the Spirit of God might not withdraw from him, even when he might have deserved the loss.

The lessons for the believer are especially these two.

First of all, that the Holy Spirit will dwell in him. He who desires to be led in the way of grace by the hand of David must now know that if he would see preserved and confirmed the blessings on which his heart is set, namely, forgiveness, renewal, restoration to the favour of God; if he would truly be all that grace would make him,—then he must keep himself largely occupied with the promise of the Spirit, and must hold his desires firmly fixed upon it. Let him search in the word of God for all the

promises concerning the operation of the Spirit. Let him know certainly this gift is held out to him. Let him yield himself unreservedly to the Lord, to experience this glorious grace. Let him seek to live daily in the fellowship of the Spirit: he shall experience that this is the highest blessing that is to be found on earth.

In the second place, this blessing must be a distinct element in the prayer for grace. The soul that is desirous of salvation must feel that he is unworthy of this blessing, and forfeits it at every turn. He must every day observe that it is a favour that God does not take away His Spirit. He must feel that according to the measure of the earnestness of his desire and prayer and faith shall his growing establishment in this blessing take place, and his communion with the Spirit become more conscious and effectual. And according to this measure also shall the preceding blessings, of which this is the seal and the crown, be more richly and gloriously communicated to him; while, on the other hand, the neglect of this prayer shall have as its consequence, not only the loss of this blessing, but also the obscuration of the other blessings that may have previously been enjoyed. Let it therefore be with all possible emphasis of entreaty that we say: 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.'

Twenty-First Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.'—Ver. 12*a*.

WE have seen at an earlier stage of our studies that David spoke of a twofold cleanness. There was first a judicial cleanness, as freedom from guilt, the fruit of the divine acquittal, on the basis of the atonement of Christ, 'the being washed in the blood of Christ.' And there was also an inward cleanness, wrought in the soul by the creative and renewing energy of the Holy Spirit.

Hence also he speaks of a twofold joy, as is manifest from the connection in which his words stand. He had previously said: 'Make me to hear joy and gladness' (ver. 8). Standing betwixt the repeated petition for forgiveness (cf. vers. 8, 9), that word has a distinct relation to the first joy over the forgiveness of sins. The prayer which we have here in ver. 12, on the other hand, following as it does expressions which point so clearly to the inner life of grace and sanctification, teaches us that the

joy of God's salvation is not only the desire and the portion of those just converted who are rejoicing in the first gladness of forgiveness, but is equally destined for the Christian who is striving onward in the pathway of growth and sanctification.

Let us bestow careful thought on this connection. We have already seen that the first joy of the soul that has received grace depends on the knowledge of forgiveness. The sinner that has once been awakened to know his sin cannot possibly rejoice in God, unless he knows God as One who has blotted out his sin. He knows that, if this blessing has not been received by him, God is still his enemy, and a consuming fire. Only when the soul has come to the cross and received an interest in the atonement of Christ, can the thought of the holy God fill it with gladness. It is fellowship with the reconciling God that imparts joy.

And, in like manner, the continuance and growth of the soul's joy depends on deepening communion with this God. The very first act of God in beginning this fellowship with the soul, namely, the forgiveness of sins, imparts gladness. The next work of God in the soul is sanctification, in which, through His work of restoration, He establishes in it the clean heart and the steadfast spirit, a life in the light of His countenance, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This also gives joy. And just as little as the soul can experience its first gladness *without forgiveness*, can it experience continued joy *apart from a holy life*. As certainly as the guilt of

the old sin robs the soul of all joy, until it knows that it is forgiven, shall new contamination that is not confessed and put away fill the soul with darkness.

Would that the young convert, the soul that desires to be saved and the soul that has received grace, reflected on this fact. The joy of forgiveness will not always remain, unless it be confirmed as the joy of sanctification. In this experience many a Christian has incurred heavy loss, through lack of carefulness or knowledge. When the first joy began to yield, he did not know what the reason was, or else he was unfaithful in not confessing the sad fact to God: he ascribed the loss to God as a trial which He had sent him. Ah, had he only gone forward in the way of grace, had he but asked for grace, not only to be washed from guilt, but also to be liberated from the dominion of sin, he would have found by experience that with the progressive work of grace in the soul a progressive joy would have been ministered unto him by God. It is the joy of God's *salvation* for which David prays: there is joy in God's salvation: according as we only yield ourselves to God for it, faithfully and wholly, we shall enjoy it.

And thus this twofold joy is one. We have already said this of the twofold purity. It is thus also with the joy. It is sin that entails pain and misery. It is becoming free from sin that imparts light and gladness. It is one God that first rolls away the curse and the guilt of sin, in one moment,

and then gradually makes the soul free from its power: the joy is also one. The soul that rejoices in forgiveness ought to know that there is joy, a joy that is still sweeter, still deeper, still more glorious than this, when the emancipation from sin and fellowship with God that grace begins with forgiveness, are continued and are with inward appropriation applied and confirmed in the sanctification of the soul. The joy of forgiveness is but the beginning, the first-fruits, and is destined for the newly-born child of God: it is the milk of the blessing: the joy of sanctification and of fellowship with God is for those that have grown up: it is the solid food, the ripe fruit of joy.

Set thyself then, soul that desirest to be saved, and hast come thus far with David in this Psalm, to let this petition sink deep into thy heart. The joy and the blessedness of God are His perfect holiness. The joy of His children also is the joy of holiness. Without a clean heart and a holy walk the Christian cannot continuously experience joy. The life of sanctification is joy. The way of the blessed life, the way of the clean heart and the steadfast spirit, the life before God's countenance under the leading of the Spirit, was once, indeed, represented as beset with groans and fears, and as a grievous way. God has changed it into a way of joy. Some sacrifice of the flesh may at the outset appear unwelcome and severe; but God has declared that he who shall once for all and unreservedly yield himself to it, shall find in His service great reward

and the joy of His salvation. It is only in the measure that the salvation of God is appropriated effectually, and as an element of actual experience, that joy can be tasted. Joy is not, as some would have it, a separate gift which can be received and enjoyed apart from further experience of God's salvation; no: it is the joy *of that salvation*, and is tasted just in proportion as the soul surrenders itself to that salvation, and to the redeeming, sanctifying grace of God which bestows it. Hence it is that there are so many Christians who seek for the comfort and joy of redemption, and even pray for it, and yet do not find it; while those who are less anxious about joy, and simply concentrate their care on seeing and tasting the salvation of God, on knowing, believing, and doing all that the salvation of God requires, are of their own accord glad in the Lord, and are filled with the joy of His salvation. Let him who would be glad only cleave to the Lord, the source of all joy. Let him who would have joy, surrender himself to the salvation of the Lord: let him live first in the assurance of forgiveness and in devotion to sanctification: then he may with confidence ask and expect 'a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.'

Twenty-Second Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'And uphold me with a free spirit.'—Ver. 12*b*.

GRACE first restores man to a right relation to God. Thereby it also restores him to a right relation to himself: and, as a result of this, he comes also to a right attitude towards his fellow-men. When grace makes the soul partaker of the favour of God and the Spirit of God, the joy of God's salvation is shed abroad in the heart, and then as the fruit of this prevenient blessing, heart and mouth are opened to make others acquainted with the grace of God. It is this blessing that David now entreats from the divine mercy. He feels his calling; he is aware of his weakness; in the midst of this infirmity he reckons on help from above.

David realises his calling. Every ransomed soul must be a witness and an example of the grace of God. For the honour of God and the salvation of others, he is bound to make known what great

things the Lord has done for his soul. He knows that the living witness is better than the dead letter, and that the world shall be constrained to acknowledge the work of God and adore His grace, only when believers confess with distinctness and boldness what God has done for them, and show by word and walk that it is due to His compassion that they can set their seal to it that God is faithful. They must be in the presence of the world a convincing proof of what grace can really effect. Amongst men a candle is never lit to be hidden under a bushel; and the Eternal desires that His people, the light of the world, should let their light shine. All this David knew: he will not repudiate what God has joined together; and as cordially as he had confessed his sin and entreated redemption, does he also prepare himself for the service of thanksgiving and of love.

But he also knows his own weakness. He remembers how lightly his confidence before men might well be esteemed. He had experienced what every believer can testify to, how the world and all that is of the world, even though it should assume the form only of a slight departure from God towards sin, must shut the mouth, or, if the testimony is given, must render it ineffectual. The feeling which he expresses in another psalm, 'I have believed, therefore have I spoken,' was the utterance of his own experience. He knew that unless he had the Spirit of faith he could not know how to speak aright. And with the consciousness that there was

still in him so much of the fear of man as well as of sluggishness and unfaithfulness, it was a matter of necessity for him, ere he passed to the promises of thanksgiving, to pour out a prayer for this gift of divine grace also: 'Uphold me with a free spirit.'

David knew that he could reckon upon it, that the grace of God would bestow this blessing also upon him. Grace not only imparts forgiveness of sins, renewal of heart and sanctification of life, but is also prepared to put the soul in a position to praise God and confess His name in the midst of every duty to which it is summoned. This is a point that believers understand too imperfectly and reflect on too little. They feel that the forgiveness of sin is an act of mere grace on the part of God: they acknowledge perhaps that the sanctification of the life must also be wrought by grace. They do not know that the free spirit, with its power, must also just as certainly be the gift of free grace. They are persuaded that the open confession of the grace of God and the proclamation of His goodness to others is indeed the work by which out of gratitude they are bound to requite the Lord, as with the best they have to give. But they feel that they are not equal to this duty, and continue often to lie helpless in their weakness and unfaithfulness, full of self-accusation and self-reproach. They are not aware that grace not only begins the work of redemption, but also completes it; that with the same certitude as when they first prayed for forgiveness, they may also expect that God will put them in a position to fulfil

their vows of thanksgiving. It was in the confidence that this was indeed the case that David prayed: 'Have mercy upon me. Uphold me with a free spirit.'

'A free spirit': the word yields very important points. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,' freedom from all servitude, from all oppression, freedom especially from the fear and doubt which more than else weaken the soul. It is only in the life of the Spirit and the entire surrender of the heart to be filled by the Spirit of God that abiding freedom can be found. It is always only freedom before God that makes us free also in relation to man. And for this full confidence before God it is indispensable that we should resort much to Him, hold much fellowship with Him, and be conscious of maintaining an unreserved surrender to His will and service. He who has thus assured his heart before God shall never need to fear before any man. The continued unclouded consciousness of God's friendship, nourished in hidden conscientious intercourse with Him, will make the soul free from the dominion of the fear of man, and, besides, put it in a position to testify of the praise of God.

Believer, pray for a free spirit. Grace will certainly bestow it upon you. You hinder grace in its work if you remain without this blessing. You set yourselves in contentment with the half of what the grace of God is prepared to do for you. You defraud grace of the honour due to it, if you continue satisfied without this gift. It is due to you,

it is your privilege, and a portion destined for you by God, to walk with a free spirit in the face of the world and of sin, as one of God's redeemed, and as a child of the heavenly King. Only live the life of grace; only receive the blessings of redemption as they are presented in the verses of this Psalm; let the joy of God's salvation fill you; and in answer to prayer this free spirit also shall become your cherished possession. If you do not yet have it, let your faith stretch out towards it and expect it: be much engaged in the sincere, earnest prayer: 'Uphold me with a free spirit': out of the riches of the grace of God, you shall certainly obtain it.

V.

The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving.

13. Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways;
And sinners shall be converted unto Thee.

14. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation;
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.

15. O Lord, open Thou my lips;
And my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.

16. For Thou delightest not in sacrifice, else would I give it;
Thou hast no pleasure in burnt-offering.

17. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

18. Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion:
Build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.
Then shalt Thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, in burnt-offering, and whole burnt-offering:
Then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar.

'Then will I teach Thy ways unto
those that transgressors be;
And those that sinners are shall then
be turned unto Thee.

O God, of my salvation God,
me from blood-guiltiness
Set free; then shall my tongue aloud
sing of Thy righteousness.

My closed lips, O Lord, by Thee
let them be opened;
Then shall Thy praises by my mouth
abroad be published.

For Thou desir'st not sacrifice
else would I give it Thee;
Nor wilt Thou with burnt-offering
at all delighted be.

A broken spirit is to God
a pleasing sacrifice:
A broken and a contrite heart,
Lord, Thou wilt not despise.

Show kindness, and do good, O Lord,
to Sion, Thine own hill:
The walls of Thy Jerusalem
build up of Thy good will.

Then righteous off'rings shall Thee please,
and off'rings burnt, which they
With whole burnt-off'rings, and with calves,
shall on Thine altar lay.'

—SCOTTISH PSALTER.

Twenty-Third Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways.'—Ver. 13*a*.

HERE begins the third chief part of this Psalm. The first was occupied with confession of sin. After this came prayer for the redemption David desired, namely, forgiveness of sin and renewal of the heart by the Spirit of God. And now comes what must always be the fruit of redemption: he will praise the Lord and make known His grace to others: as a servant of God he will yield himself to the great work of teaching transgressors God's ways.

This is the aim of God in the case of every soul to whom He manifests His grace. Of all God's children this word holds good: 'The people which I formed for Myself, that they might set forth My praise' (Isa. xliii. 41); and everyone of them falls in with the language of Paul: 'For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief might Jesus Christ show forth all His longsuffering for an ex-

ample of them which should hereafter believe on Him unto eternal life' (1 Tim. i. 16). God must have honour from His work, and this honour is given to Him when a ransomed soul magnifies Him, and makes known the great things which He has done for him.

On earth no one lights a candle and puts it under a bushel: much less would the Most High God of heaven do so. To all whom He translates out of the kingdom of darkness He says: 'Ye are the light of the world: let your light shine.' Soul, if with David you have offered up this prayer for grace, and have hope that there is grace for you, then fix your attention carefully on that which the Holy Spirit would teach you from David's prayer. The design of grace is to make you a witness for the love of God, and at the same time a monument of His wonderful goodness. Let your soul surrender itself to this aim and plan of God, and say in His strength, when you pray for grace: 'Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways.'

Do not imagine, however, that God requires this of you as a debt which you must pay to Him in return for your redemption. No: if you will only yield yourself to this work in the strength of grace, it will be your greatest joy to say: 'Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways.' When you think of the abyss out of which you have been rescued, and the glorious salvation which has become your portion; of the deep misery in which others still lie overwhelmed, and how God's precious grace is also

for them, mighty and ready to redeem them as it has redeemed you,—your heart will be filled with compassion for sinners, and you will count it a blessing that you may exercise the privilege of speaking of this Jesus to others. When you reflect what the love of Jesus has done for you, and how much you have to thank Him for, this love will constrain you; and as often as you pray anew: 'O God, have mercy upon me, then will I teach transgressors Thy way,' the desire will be awakened in you that others also, who are still far from the precious Saviour, and strangers to Him, may learn to know Him as you also now know Him. You have always the assurance that then only shall they be truly happy; and what is more, that then also they will glorify the Lord. For you feel more than you are able to express in words, how truly worthy He is to be known and glorified. Yes: the mere thought that this and that 'transgressor' might be awakened to life, that this and that worldling might be changed into an example of the grace of God,—and this through your prayer and your teaching,—this, I say, is sufficient to make your heart burst open with joy. And this will not appear impossible to you, if you look to Him who has shown you favour, and to His love for sinners, which will deign to make use also of your service.

But I know well what other reflections will easily sweep over you. You will also think of your own unfitness for this task, and you will feel that you do not know how you shall ever be in a

position to teach transgressors God's ways. The joy and the gladness of redemption are well-nigh taken away from you, through dread of having to face this great and heavy duty. Not so, my friend. Pray, observe that this promise emerges in a prayer—in a prayer for grace. David only says that, if God shows him favour, restores to him the joy of His salvation, and grants him the upholding of a free spirit, he will then teach transgressors His ways. *O the Lord does not require of you more than what He Himself will enable you to perform.* Pray, forget not that to one who has had his heart filled with grace it is a source of pleasure, a joy, to make others acquainted with Jesus. Acknowledge that the reason why it is felt so irksome to speak of Jesus is nothing but the fact that we ourselves are content with so little of the grace of God, that we do not yield ourselves to be wholly filled with it. Let the fear and the irksomeness which you feel convince you that you do not yet have as much grace as God is prepared to give. God would fain give to every soul so much blessing that his mouth shall overflow, because his heart is full; that he shall not be able to remain silent; that love to Jesus and to souls shall constrain him to speak. Go therefore to God again, and still more earnestly, with the prayer for the full joy of the forgiveness of sins and for the full indwelling of the Spirit: then *will you also* teach transgressors His ways. Set this duty constantly before you. It is this that God desires from those that have been enriched

with grace. It is this service that grace will enable you to render. It is this by which the true joy and the full power of grace shall be first discovered.

Perhaps you ask where and when, to whom and how, you are to teach God's ways. My brother, all this the Lord Himself will make known to you. The constraint of love itself will teach you this. Love will seek opportunities, will create opportunities. Are you lying on a sickbed? You have still a grand opportunity of teaching others. Is your circle of acquaintance narrow and limited? In your own house there may be some to whom the ways of God are unknown. Are you simple and ignorant? It is the words of such that oftentimes find the fullest entrance into the hearts of others. O, the world is full of transgressors; and the heart of Jesus is full of love. If you have really tasted His love, you must admit that there can be no work so glorious as to be the messenger and the servitor of this love to redeem souls that are going to perdition. And if, besides this, you know that this grace which has made you alive from the dead is also able to open your mouth, and thereby bestow this wondrous blessing on others, this also is wrought out in you for a worthy end. Brother, forget it not: every soul that has been endowed with grace is called to the work of teaching transgressors God's ways, and shall receive strength to carry it out with a willing and joyful heart.

Twenty-Fourth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'And sinners shall be converted unto Thee.'—Ver. 13*b*.

WE have seen that David had sinned deeply, and still felt his fall keenly. If there was anyone who had reason to stand ashamed, never to trust himself, and to be silent, it was David. If there was anyone who had reason to say that he did not know to what plight he might yet come, it was David. And if there was anyone who had reason to say that, by his unfaithfulness and the reproach which he had brought on his earlier profession, he had no right to speak, and no one was under an obligation to listen to him, and that on account of his sin his words would be stripped of all force, it was David. How exalted he had been in other days, and how deeply had he fallen now. But, no: in this Psalm David is in converse with God and His grace: in his prayer he already anticipates the glory of God's grace. He feels that the grace of God is more powerful than his sin, and that as

grace could take away his sin before God, so also it could bring it about that his sin should not prevent his access to men. He feels that if grace had redeemed him, the chief of sinners, and had shown its great goodness to him, it would also be prepared to make use of him as a blessing to others. And therefore he not only promises: 'I will teach transgressors Thy ways,' but also believes that God will certainly bless his work: 'Sinners shall be converted unto Thee.' He trusts in grace for others, even as for himself. The grace which has blessed him will make him a blessing. 'I will teach transgressors Thy ways; *and sinners* shall be converted unto Thee.'

It may be easily conceived what a power there must be in such a confidence that there shall be blessing upon our work. With what spirit, with what pleasure, will one work in the sure prospect that God will give the increase. And the great question for us must be this: how shall we succeed in cherishing this believing persuasion? Let us consider carefully on what foundation it rests.

Remember, first of all, that conversion is given *in the use of means.* '*I will* teach *transgressors; sinners shall be* converted.' It is not enough to mourn over the poor unbelieving world. It is not even enough to pray for the conversion of sinners. Something more is necessary. They must be taught. And this teaching must not simply be dispensed on the Lord's day, or be handed over to the preachers of the gospel: every believer must within his own

circle faithfully perform and carry out the promise of the text. On the back of the prayer: 'Have mercy upon me,' must the promise follow: 'I will teach'; God is faithful to grant conversion. O what a marvellous change would take place in a congregation, if, with all wisdom and perseverance, unanimously and continuously, every believer were a witness for God: the faithful use of means would give courage for the expectation: 'Sinners shall be converted unto Thee.'

Observe, further, *in what spirit* the means are to be used. David says that, as one who had been pardoned, who had received the forgiveness of God and the joy of His salvation, he will teach transgressors. O, it is this that is the chief concern. Alas! how many preachers, and Sabbath-school teachers, and Christian elders and friends are there in whose teaching there is no power, and who never see the fulfilment of the hope: 'Sinners shall be converted unto Thee.' It is not that they are not zealous, or that they do not teach the truth, even the truths of this Psalm; but they do not speak in the living experience of this grace. They teach in the power of a knowledge of the truths of Scripture, or in the power of an earlier spiritual experience. But this is not enough. No, brother: if you would see the teaching and conversion of sinners, there must be in you a living and effective experience of the grace of God. The blotting out of your guilt in a tender and daily use of the blood of Jesus must be the joy of your soul. Your walk in a progressive

sanctification must be carried out through the purifying of your heart and the renewing of a steadfast spirit in your inmost life. With the prayer: 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me,' your whole being must be that of one in whose heart Jesus makes His abode. With the earnest petition: 'Uphold me with a free spirit,' the purpose must at every turn be renewed and carried into execution: 'I will teach transgressors Thy ways.'

This must at least be your effort, your prayer. When, chiming in with the aspiration of this Psalm, you say: '*Then* will I teach,' you may also surely add: 'sinners shall be converted unto Thee.' Let your teaching of others only be the fruit of indwelling grace: it cannot remain unblessed. Yes, believe: bathe daily in the blood of Jesus; seek daily the anointing of His Spirit; live near to Jesus, and 'sinners shall be converted.'

And observe especially that this confidence must be nourished and expressed in *prayer*. David did not look to himself and his power: it was while he was looking up to God in prayer that David uttered that glorious word of faith. And indeed it is no light thing for any suppliant to express such confidence in connection with his work. Many a one would regard and treat it as harsh arrogance, if we were to say to him that this utterance of David's prayer is not adapted to him. No, brother: if you will only utter the words as David did, they are also for you. Following on the continuous and repeated prayer for grace in all its varied operations; follow-

ing on the habitual surrender of yourself to the service of the Lord; uttered on the knees, with the eye fixed on this God who has shown to you His effectual grace,—this hope is not too much to cherish: 'I will teach, and sinners shall be converted.' And if at the outset you may not altogether succeed in using these words in full faith, then take the utterance again into your lips, express the hope again on your knees to Him who sits on the throne of grace; only begin with the first starting-point: 'Have mercy upon me, O God,' and climb this wonderful ladder of prayer by the various steps of the spiritual life; make sure of each stage in your own heart by the way until you come to this: 'I will teach transgressors'; and the Spirit of prayer, who has taught you to use all the other petitions, will not break off His work at this point: He will enable you to utter this word also with increasing confidence: '*Sinners shall be converted unto Thee.*' And just as prayer and conflict became the power that led to the utterance of this word, so shall this word in return become your power to say to sinners: 'Sinners shall be converted; I will teach transgressors.'

'Have mercy upon me. O God. Then will I teach transgressors; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.'

Twenty-Fifth Day

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation.'—Ver. 14*a*.

DAVID has made a great promise: he is to teach transgressors God's ways. And he has at the same time uttered a high expectation: by his teaching sinners shall be converted. The words, however, are scarcely out of his lips when he feels again how deeply sinful he is, and how it can only be in the experience of supernatural grace that such a happy result shall ever be achieved. He feels that the blood of Uriah still adheres to him, and has defiled him in the presence of God and man; and that it can only be if God bestows upon him the perfect and living assurance that he is fully acquitted from his sins, that he shall ever be able to praise God in truth.

I find here again confirmed the important lesson I have already taught, namely, that *the living personal experience of grace is a certain power in work*

for others. The soul must be steadfast in the enjoyment of its own redemption. There must not merely be the remembrance of forgiveness and grace, experienced at an earlier stage: this is not enough. There must be every day anew the divine assurance that we ourselves are redeemed by God. There must be a living consciousness of redemption as a present fact, a continually renewed, an ever fresh exercise of fellowship with the God of redemption. The soul that does not thus know God cannot make Him known with power to others. David felt this. The murderer of Uriah, stained with the guilt of blood, how should he be able to bring life to others whilst he is still bound to give an account of the blood of Uriah?

And thus it is impossible for me rightly to teach others, if I do not know God aright myself. And that man does not know God aright who does not know Him as the God of forgiveness. Moreover, this knowledge cannot be living and real, if it is not continually renewed from heaven by the Holy Spirit. Every time that, in accordance with my purpose of teaching transgressors, and my hope that sinners shall be converted, I am prepared to give my testimony, it must be with the prayer, ever expressed anew: 'Deliver me, O God, Thou God of my salvation. Then shall my tongue sing aloud of Thy righteousness.'

When one considers the words of this petition closely, these thoughts will be found to be still more fully confirmed. Let us reflect on the word

that is here used in this prayer: *Deliver* me from blood-guiltiness. This is a term that we have not as yet met with in this Psalm. It is commonly used, not so much of setting free from sin, as of deliverance from enemies that pursue and oppress us. It is thus, for example, in the prayer: 'Deliver us from the Evil One'; and it is from this point of view that David now contemplates his sins. That God has forgiven them to him, he believes. That he has also been washed from them, he is also assured. But, lo! there sometimes come occasions in the life of the believer when sins that have long since been forgiven, as it were, rise up again and pursue and overtake the soul. God has forgiven them; but he that committed them cannot, however, forget them, and stands in dread of a new outbreak of their violence. The great enemy of souls then makes use of these times of oppression and of these sins to cast down the soul utterly to the dust. In that case there is but one remedy. God alone can then deliver us from the heavy sense of guilt. But He *can* do it. He can give us such a view of the completeness of His forgiveness and grace, that we shall stand thoroughly delivered out of the hand of our enemies, and know assuredly that sin shall have no more dominion over us. He can make us understand the full significance of the glorious words of the New Testament: 'He was manifested to take away sins,' in order that we may have 'no more conscience of sins' (1 John iii. 5; Heb. x. 2). Through the Holy Spirit, God grants to us to know

the redemption of the Lord Jesus so fully, that we have in it the full answer to the petition: 'Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation.' And then the enjoyment of such a complete deliverance becomes the urgent impulse to sing aloud of His righteousness. O soul, who dost not yet know if thou canst celebrate God's praise, come and experience this blessing. Let it by the Holy Spirit become a matter of living knowledge in your heart, how glorious it is to be delivered by God; and your mouth will then open of itself to celebrate the praise of this God.

The same idea is found in the very name by which David here designates God: 'O God, Thou God of my salvation.' It is because he is the God of *my salvation* that I feel the joyful impulse to praise Him. The personal relation or connection betwixt God and men, the living assurance and experience of it, are indispensable for this end; but they are at the same time all-sufficient to stir me up to make Him known. And if anyone would know how he is to succeed in calling God by this name, let him learn it from David. In the beginning of the Psalm, he was not yet prepared to use the appropriating word. He has several times addressed the Lord as 'God,' but not yet as 'my God.' Under the power of continued prayer, however, as well as the constantly renewed entreaty for grace, his faith is strengthened, and the Spirit of God has given him courage thus to cleave closely to God: 'Thou art the God of my salvation.' So shall it

be with you also. If with every sin, old or new, you cast yourself before Him with entreaty for experience of the fulness of His grace,—forgiveness, renewal, and complete redemption,—courage will be given in the midst of such prayer to say with all the spiritual freedom of faith: 'The God of *my salvation*.' May many that are looking for assurance of faith come to a right sense of this fact. It is not a matter for argumentation, but it is learned in prayer. He who would know from God whether he may truly say to Him: 'Thou art my God, the God of my salvation,' must obtain the privilege in prayer.

And when the soul has thus once learned to use this language of faith towards God, it will not be so difficult for it to use it towards men. It is impossible to use a twofold style of speech, such as that of freedom before God and that of hesitancy before men. As we speak to God in secret, must we confess Him in public. And the principal theme and chief characteristic of the announcement of glad tidings to others, as well as its special power, is the confession: He is the God of *my* salvation. What He has done for me, He can do also for you. As a witness I speak from experience: what the word says, I confirm with all the certitude of personal knowledge: the God who has redeemed me will also redeem you.

Twenty-Sixth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'And my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.'—Ver. 14*b*.

ONCE again, after the petition, comes the promise. Grace does not selfishly long merely for personal enjoyment or safety, but lays itself out for honour to God the Giver, and for blessing to others who have need of it. The renewed experience of fellowship with God, as the God of his salvation, will of itself bear the glorious fruit, that his tongue shall praise this God. 'Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.'

The words of this promise are very significant and instructive. Observe, first of all, the main theme of this joyful celebration: it is the righteousness of God. It is as if this psalm of grace and redemption could not end without this word, the most glorious in which the work of God in connection with our redemption is presented. It is the word that the Holy Spirit by preference uses to indicate to us as well the origin as the way and the fruit of our redemption: *the righteousness of God*. It embraces in one word the *attribute* of God, which is glorified in our redemption,

the *gift* with which we are endued, and the *operation* and revelation of this redemption in our life. For the soul that is yearning to be saved, or for those that have been recently converted, the word *grace* has a most charming sound, and appears to be the most attractive and encouraging. The growing knowledge of grace will always bring the ransomed soul to the righteousness of God, as that in which the love of God has its foundation, and in which the believer thus also seeks his stability. And therefore to the first promise to teach transgressors God's ways, these words are added, namely, the resolve especially to proclaim also His righteousness. Let us endeavour to understand this word.

It indicates, first of all, the attribute of God that moves and guides Him in the bestowal of grace. Grace in the forgiveness of our unrighteousness is not exhibited at the expense of the righteousness of God. No: grace reigns through righteousness; it is from the righteousness of God that grace derives its power. So John writes: 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and *righteous* to forgive us our sins'; as Paul also says: 'That God might be righteous when He justifies the ungodly' (Rom. iii. 26, iv. 5). Hence it is that in the psalms and prophecies so frequent mention is made of this righteousness of God as that which His people specially celebrate and rejoice in. Some have not been able to understand this, and imagine that in these passages the word righteousness must be understood as synonymous with goodness. But this is not the case. The righteousness of God, the dis-

position in Him by which He always does what is right, is the foundation of His throne, also of His throne of grace. Believers have from the beginning been led by the Spirit to understand that the only way by which the unrighteous can be redeemed and become righteous must be that God, the only righteous One, shall communicate His righteousness to them.

The phrase, 'Thy righteousness,' comes then to mean, further, the righteousness that is bestowed upon the sinner in God's gracious sentence of acquittal. David had prayed: 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' That 'whiter than snow' can be maintained only in the possession of the righteousness of God. The New Testament makes it plain how this can be. In the Mediator, the man Christ Jesus, the righteousness of God is brought near to us. By His obedience and suffering He has brought in an everlasting righteousness; and just as by the sin of the first Adam death reigned over all that belong to him, so also by this one righteousness of the second Adam grace comes upon all that adhere to Him, unto justification of life. And as from Abraham onwards faith is reckoned for righteousness, so through all succeeding periods it is the grace of God which justifies the ungodly that has been the hope and the joy of His people. 'In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory' (Isa. xlv. 25).

Then, further, this word also signifies the effect of the grace of God. The sentence of acquittal by which God justifies the sinner, and the righteousness of Christ in which he obtains part, become in him a power of God for sanctification, are in him the

seed of a new life of righteousness. 'He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous' (1 John iii. 7). Grace reigns through righteousness *unto life*. Grace renews the soul after the likeness, and the spirit of the Righteous One and the righteousness of God in Christ, first imputed by faith, becomes the new nature in which God's children walk. 'If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that everyone also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him.'

This is, according to the New Testament, the full signification of this word, 'the righteousness of God.' And it was just of this that David said: 'My tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.' He was to glory in it. He saw such glory in it; the revelation of it was for his soul so delightful and worthy of admiration, that he was not only to speak of it, but was also to celebrate its value and praise: he was to glory in it as something that had now become his portion. He was to praise it *joyfully*. It would be observed of him that this was not a burden laid upon him, a thing of the mere fulfilment of duty, but something that was his delight: he was to speak of it with joy and gladness.

Redeemed soul, let it be thus with you. On every occasion draw near to God for a new, divine, effectual experience of the righteous grace of the Lord in the complete deliverance from your guilt. Your mouth will then become open to celebrate joyfully the righteousness of the Lord. Every repetition of the prayer: 'Deliver me, O God, Thou God of my salvation,' will give you strength and joy for the promise: 'And my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.'

Twenty-Seventh Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

O Lord, open Thou my lips ; and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.'—Ver. 15.

ONCE again the promise to celebrate God's praise is repeated, preceded, however, by the prayer that grace itself would give strength for the fulfilment of it. We have already seen how self-evident it is that the full and living experience of God's salvation will agree to praise God: just as, on the other hand, this tribute is, without the experience, an impossibility. We see here further, however, that this is also a gift which must be asked from grace in prayer, and will then be certainly obtained.

This petition reminds us of the natural reluctance and inability of man to speak of God and to witness of His grace. The experience of almost every believer may serve as a confirmation of this truth. How much is there indeed to shut the mouth, even when the soul enjoys the grace of God, and is eagerly desirous to work for Him. At one time,

for instance, it is the fear of man which turns back before the possibility of mockery and contempt. At another it is unbelief, which, under the sense of its own unfitness, or the remembrance how often the most earnest endeavours are fruitless, take away all courage and delight in the work. Then, again, there is that hidden self-interestedness which finds an excuse in its own poverty, and the need of working in its own soul. And yet, once more, there is that show of humility which is afraid of doing injury to God's name by confessing Him now, and then presently becoming disloyal and unfaithful, and which also learns to say that one can often do more by silence than by speech. Alas! many a believer could tell us of a time when he desired to work for the Lord, of months and years spent in wishing and longing, of brief endeavours and swift disappointments, until the shut lips became fixed into a habit, and the conscience, by all sorts of excuses, had brought itself into a state of entire passivity. Would that they had only understood what the true middle way is betwixt sinful silence and precipitate and fruitless speech. Would that they had but understood that, along with the forgiveness of sins and the renewal of the life, *grace will also give the opening of the lips*; and that the continued prayer: 'Have mercy upon me, O God; open my lips,' will obtain a sure and blessed hearing.

This prayer, then, recorded here by the Spirit of God, assures us that the Lord can and will open

the lips. He who sincerely desires to believe that has only to reflect on what stands recorded in the word of God on this point. Read the history of Moses, and let the wonderful arguments by which God showed him His power to bestow upon him a speaking mouth, sink deep into your soul (Ex. iv. 10–12). Everyone who will humbly and earnestly listen to the divine words of encouragement will be strengthened in this confidence. Read also the story of the calling of Jeremiah (Jer. i. 7–9) and of the other prophets, and see how fully He presents the power to speak as one of His gifts. Consider the promises of the Old Testament about the gift of the Spirit, and observe how it is coupled with the power to speak. Mark also the predictions of the Lord Jesus concerning witnessing for Him as the fruit of the gift of the Spirit (John xv. 26, 27; Acts i. 8). Remember how, on the day of Pentecost, the first manifestation of the power of the exalted Christ was to fill the mouth with God's praise; and you will understand what a high place, what a divine certitude, is attached to the opening of the lips as a gift of grace, which truly belongs to us. *God can give it.* He has done so in the case of thousands. God will give it; it is necessary for the accomplishment of His glorious work of grace. *God shall give it.* His promises are faithful. 'Lord, open my lips': to this prayer we have as much right as to the other: 'Have mercy upon me, O God.' The one is heard as certainly as the other.

David's prayer teaches us the way to obtain this gift. Whenever we mention a speaking mouth, many a one thinks of natural gifts; and if he has it not, then he imagines that all that has been said has no application to his case. He will endeavour to serve God in other ways. He will thank God with his money, his influence, his example. This is all well enough, but it will not serve to liberate anyone from the holy obligation of fulfilling his glorious calling to bring to God also the sacrifice of the lips. It was one of the tokens of the coming of the kingdom of God, that not only did the blind see, but also 'the dumb spake, and praised God.' The grace of God not only takes the darkness from the eyes so as to make the soul know Him, but also opens the mouth to praise Him. Not only is many an unclean spirit cast out, but also the demon that was dumb. To all the disciples there was given, along with the Holy Spirit, the mouth to praise God. In heaven there are no dumb men: every tongue there praises God. And the Christian, in whom the loosened, liberated tongue is not heard, is defective: he is lacking in one of the most glorious capabilities of the new man. There is no question here as to whether you have a natural gift for speaking; many a one who speaks little and that feebly, receives from grace the capacity for achieving great results with that small and feeble gift. It is not beauty of language, it is power of life and spirit that the blessing depends on. Only let your desire to become partaker of

this grace also become stronger, under a sense of your solemn obligation to praise God and make Him known; only let every experience of infirmity and inability urge you anew to confidence in the power and promise of God; and out of such a desire and confidence let the prayer rise on high: 'Lord, open Thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise'; and the answer shall not remain afar off. This course may indeed cost you much conflict and perseverance. This rich petition is not learned in one day; the riches of grace are not exhausted in one day; yet he that has the will shall obtain the blessing. Therefore, every time we use the prayer: 'Have mercy upon me, O God,' let it also be with us a fixed rule, a holy habit, to add the petition: 'Lord, open Thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.'

Twenty-Eighth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'For thou delightest not in sacrifice, else would I give it: Thou hast no pleasure in burnt-offering.'—Ver. 16.

IN the joy of deliverance and thanksgiving, David has surrendered himself to God: from henceforth he will live only to honour and to praise God. He nevertheless feels how little it is that he can do, and the question arises within him, if there be not still something more that the Lord might possibly desire and receive from him. He thinks of sacrifices. Might he not, by multiplying these, accomplish a work that would be acceptable to the Lord? No: as soon as the question arises, it becomes clear to him that God has neither delight nor pleasure in sacrifices.

The clearness with which David feels and expresses this is one of the deep spiritual lessons of this Psalm. In the hidden part, God has made him to know wisdom. Sin has become better known to him in the deep spiritual misery it en-

tails than ever before. Grace has become known to him in its high spiritual power. He had experienced what the wonderful work of God in forgiveness and renewal was. He had learned to understand what the symbolical sprinklings and washings of the Old Testament indicated: he had experienced how God Himself washes and purifies the soul. And now along with this spiritual insight into sin and redemption, the Spirit has also unfolded to him the spirituality of the life of thankfulness, and shown how insufficient the service of external sacrifices would be. Under the old covenant there were two kinds of sacrifices: sin-offerings and guilt-offerings for atonement, thank-offerings and burnt-offerings to represent dedication to God. The discovery of the depths of sin has caused him to feel the need of something more than an external atonement by means of a sin-offering, namely, an effectual and divine atonement. Now also he understands that the power of such an atonement enables him to carry out more than a mere external thank-offering, that is, an inward and spiritual dedication.

This connection in the knowledge of cognate divine truths will always be seen. The deeper the acknowledgment of sin, the higher the apprehension of a divine supernatural grace, of the divinity of the Redeemer, of the working of the Spirit; and the more spiritual also the insight into the glory of that new life which grace is to enable us to live.

In all these respects this Psalm, indeed, is a pro-

phecy of the grace of the New Testament. It is always just in this utterance: 'Thou delightest not in sacrifice,' that the difference betwixt the Old and New Testaments lies. Under the old covenant and according to the law, man must always bring to God and give to God something for taking away sin. In the gospel, on the other hand, God brings to man and gives him what can atone for sin. Under the old covenant man must bring to God sacrifice in the hope that He may receive it. Under the new, on the contrary, God comes to man with a sacrifice, in order that he may receive it, and be blessed thereby. This is the meaning of the word of the prophet, repeated by the Lord Jesus when He said to the Pharisees: 'Go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' Not to require and bring sacrifices,—for that was the characteristic of the old covenant,—but to show and receive mercy, is the glory of the new covenant. And thus one who would fully enjoy the salvation of the gospel must above all endeavour to understand the utterance: 'Thou delightest not in sacrifice.'

This word reminds us of the freedom of God's grace as a source of blessing. The spirit of law-righteousness and work-righteousness is so natural to us that we are always inclined to deal with God as 'an hard and austere man,' who makes heavy demands upon us. Would that we could abandon this tendency. God is a God who does not demand but gives, and gives freely; and the secret of intercourse with Him is always to look to Him as a God

from whom one may ask and expect everything. He delights in mercy, and not in sacrifice.

That is true of the first grace of forgiveness. O soul, how long did you imagine that there was something for you to do in order to become prepared for grace; that there was something which you had to bring and offer in order to be acceptable to God. And when faith became plain to you in its simplicity as the reception of what *God had done for you and offered to you*, your response was: 'Is that all? Is salvation so near, and so easy to find?' Then you learned to understand what is meant by saying: 'Thou delightest not in sacrifices.'

The same thing is also true of the higher grace of sanctification. Holiness is not something that we must accomplish. Holiness is only in God, and we become holy only as He makes us partake of His holiness. Christ has been given to us for justification, but just as truly for sanctification. One who rightly understands that truth, enjoys the salvation of the life of grace as a continuous appropriation and reception of the fulness that is in Christ. He knows now no longer to represent the life of the divine salvation as a severe and continued sacrifice, but as a glorious experience of what the grace of God in its power and riches works in him. Obedience is better, is something higher than sacrifice: this deeply significant utterance lays bare to us the secret of the true service of God. Not what man does or brings, although it is also apparently the performance of the law, but the childlike disposition

of loving subjection, is the true fulfilling of the law. If the chief thought suggested by the service of God was once the earnestness, the difficulty, the self-sacrifice involved in it, he who believes comes in the long run to the discovery of the joy and the power of the life prepared for him through the compassion of God in Christ. His service of God becomes a service in the joy of love. Love speaks of no sacrifices. Others may indeed glory in the sacrifices which love brings: love itself does not reckon them to be sacrifices. They are to it a necessity, a delight: they are its life.

A disposition like this, which has already acknowledged the gracious attitude of God towards us, also discerns the application to our fellow-men of the word: 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.' It knows how to meet with the fallen in the compassion and tenderness of love, not with the hard requirements and sentences of the law. It understands the secret of the love through which transgressors shall learn God's ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Him. 'Thou delightest not in sacrifice,' is the gospel of personal comfort which in turn is joyfully proclaimed to others.

Twenty-Ninth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.'—Ver. 17.

IN the beginning of the Psalm, David had, out of his deep consciousness of guilt, given unmistakable evidence that his heart was broken. We have seen it manifested in his case that a contrite spirit is a sure characteristic of the penitent soul who is seeking grace. In the course of the Psalm, however, his tone undergoes a change: he has spoken of joy and gladness, and has given promises full of courage and strength. One might almost imagine from this change that a broken heart is indeed to be had, while grace as yet does not prevail; but that later on, when grace has done its work, this spiritual condition is no longer an element in the case. As a matter of fact, it is far otherwise. Even in the life of grace, from the beginning on to the very end, the disposition with which God is especially well-pleased is that which

is presented in the expression—a broken and a contrite heart. Of the life of thanksgiving, which the Spirit of the Lord desires to make us experience, this is an abiding and unmistakable feature: 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.'

This utterance teaches us how thoroughly the broken spirit will, for the believer, be at all times a token of grace. God may according to His promise forget sin: the believer forgets it never. The sense of what it means to be a sinner is not superficial and transitory, something that is very speedily effaced. No: for the maintenance of the right relation, and the enjoyment of the right relation, and the enjoyment of the right kind of intercourse betwixt the Lord and His redeemed, it remains necessary that man should always continue mindful who he is, and how much he is indebted to grace. It is just as the Lord of old said to redeemed Israel: 'I will establish My covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I have forgiven thee all that thou hast done, saith the the Lord God' (Ezek. xvi. 62, 63). It is not only the law, the sense of guilt, but especially the power of grace and forgiving love, that shall prove the means by which the soul shall be more and more, as time goes on, melted and humbled, yea, bruised before God. It will often be just the most glorious proof of the goodness of God that shall overwhelm the soul, and make it

remain contrite in the consciousness of its own unworthiness.

This word teaches us, further, the complacency that God has in this spiritual disposition. God has no delight in sacrifice, no pleasure in the mere worth of the greatest external offerings that may be brought to Him. His sacrifice is a broken spirit. It is on the inner man, on the hidden man of the heart, that He looks: it is in spirit and in truth that He is to be worshipped. The sacrifice that He desires is a living spiritual sacrifice. And if the man who is seeking salvation, or has already found grace, feels that he has so little to bring to the Lord of what He may reasonably require, yea, nothing of the love, the zeal, the cordial self-surrender, the fervent thanksgiving, which He desires,—at such a crisis this word comes in with grateful comfort: 'A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.' It reminds him that the Lord never finds so much delight in anything as in that feeling of poverty and failure which bows down the soul. This disposition makes the heart capable of receiving and duly appreciating the wonderful grace of God. This disposition teaches the soul to look away from itself and seek everything in God alone. This disposition gives glory to God alone. Over such a heart God bows down with inexpressible tenderness and complacency to fulfil gloriously in its experience the manifold promises of His word. Read the great utterances of Isaiah on this point (Isa. lvii. 15, lxvi. 1), that

there is no place in the wide world in which the holy God, when He stoops from His glory, will so readily and so certainly set up His throne as just *the contrite spirit.* Hence it is also that He devotes so much work to the accomplishment of this bruising of the heart in His children. By the law and the sense of guilt, by the experience of sin and helplessness, by many kinds of adversities and oppressions, by the operations of the Spirit and the revelations of grace,—by all this and very much more, He prepares His own for bringing to Him the sacrifice that is acknowledged with the token of His good pleasure.

This word further teaches us to understand how it is just in the broken heart and the contrite spirit that the freedom and joy of the life of grace will be chiefly manifested. This indeed appears a contradiction. So it is for nature; but certainly not for grace. God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, and the more we by the Spirit appropriate and reduce to practice His thoughts and His word, the more shall we experience how wonderfully our deep misery and God's high grace are wedded to one another, so that His life can be fully revealed only in our death, His power in our weakness, His comfort in our sorrow, His help in our impotence, His healing in our oppression, His love in our contrition. And we shall also experience that the more we die to ourselves and yield ourselves willingly to the discipline of the Spirit, by which our spirit shall be continually more and more

broken, so that all of its own hope and power shall be taken away, the more shall the consciousness of God's good pleasure and the experience of His nearness to the broken in heart become our portion.

Beloved reader, who art minded to lift up the petition: 'Have mercy upon me, O God,' forget not that this utterance is closely connected with it. It is a word betokening anxiety; but it is also a word of comfort. In the confession of sin, in the striving for holiness, in the self-dedication of thanksgiving to praise God and make Him known to others, the value of this truth is everywhere felt: 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.' And not least is this so in the case of the last form of service, that is, the joyful glorying in God's righteousness and the proclamation of His praise. There is nothing that in your work for others will enable you so much to find grace, and wield influence not only with God but also with man, as the holy ornament of a contrite spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price: 'A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.'

Thirtieth Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion: build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.'—Ver. 18.

THE Psalmist had begun with praying for grace for himself. With this, however, he cannot end. The blessed experience of what grace is, as this had been made clear to him in the lines of this prayer, makes him think, not only of the transgressors whom he is now to teach, but also of all who are partakers with him of this grace, namely, the people of God. For these also he pours out his heart; he can never forget the city of God. This is both one of the essential elements of true prayer and a principal characteristic of the true petitioner. The true suppliant is also an intercessor. Would that we could give good heed to the important lesson which these last words of the Psalm teach us.

In the first place, the true intercessors for the Church of God are those who have first learned to pray for themselves. Personal need is the school

in which true intercessors are brought up. It is in the confession of personal sins, in the conflict for the assurance of a personal interest in God's grace, that the secret of believing intercession is learned. There are always many who, in the church and the prayer-meeting, plead together for themselves and others, and yet know but little of personal dealing with God in the prayer: 'Cleanse me from my sin.' These still know little of true prayer. The sinner must first of all feel as if he were the only one with whom God had to do. He must attain to dealing with God for himself alone: then he will learn to understand the grace of God, and know how to plead for this blessing in behalf of the people and the city of the Lord. He then obtains, not only courage to speak of God to his fellow-men, but also delight in the work; he feels, too, that he has power to speak and plead with God in behalf of his fellow-men.

Those who have thus learned to pray for themselves become intercessors of their own accord. Grace is not self-seeking. The love of God shed abroad in the heart works love to God's people and Church. This is true in the ancient people of Jehovah. Think, for example, of the prayers of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel (Ezra ix., Neh. ix., Dan. ix.), or of the way in which the converted Saul of Tarsus bore the congregations of God on his heart. It is on this account that such suppliants are called 'watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem,' 'the Lord's remembrancers' (Isa. lxii. 6). It is a part of the wonderful honour which the grace of God bestows,

that God makes us fellow-workers with Him, and that He should use us in awakening, not only men, but also Himself. He is prepared to take counsel with us, and, at our urgent request, He will bestow blessing. Hence it will always be seen that, as soon as there are many in a congregation that, in their own experience, learn to understand the grace of God as exhibited in this Psalm, the prayer-meeting will speedily furnish evidence of the fact in the growing use of the petition: 'Do good unto Zion.'

It is, however, not merely the experience of the grace of God in the deliverance from personal sin that thus stirs up to prayer. There is still something more. David felt himself to be one with the people, and fearing lest his sin might possibly prove injurious to the city as a whole, he prayed that these hurtful consequences might be averted. And thus is it with every true suppliant. Mindful of the terrible power of sin to carry infection and desolation far beyond the sphere in which it had its origin, the intercessor entreats the Lord to turn aside the dreaded evil, and, notwithstanding his sin, to do good to Zion according to His good pleasure.

'Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion.' It is to God's good pleasure in Zion that intercessors appeal when they ask Him to do good to her. As in the prayer for grace the Psalmist appeals to God's loving-kindness and the greatness of His compassion, so here also he turns to God's good pleasure in His people. He has not to stir up God to show favour; he has not to awaken dispositions in God that are

not already in existence. No: it is what he knows God to be that gives him power and courage to pray. Would that we could never forget this. Our strongest argument in prayer is the being and the heart of God. The more we cleave to what God has revealed to us concerning His feelings towards His people, and to His purposes and promises, the more shall we feel the power to pray. The good pleasure of God towards Zion will be the ground of our hope, the measure of our expectations, and the strength of our assurance of faith. Were our souls only more fully possessed by this conviction, how thoroughly should we feel ourselves aroused by the wonderful thought that that good pleasure waits upon our poor prayers, and will act according to them, to pray more earnestly: 'Do good unto Zion.'

This great comprehensive beneficence is expressed in the words: 'Build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.' That petition includes *building up*, where they were not yet completed; *rebuilding*, where they were broken down by hostile attacks; *outbuilding*, where they had become too narrow for the growing number of inhabitants. It includes prayer for the new spiritual growth and progress of the congregation of the Lord, for the maintenance of God's authority and truth over against the hostile powers of unbelief and the world, and for the extension of the kingdom of God by the ingathering of those who do not as yet know Him.

He that really knows the grace of God, and has endeavoured to understand what His plan and good

pleasure are with respect to the city which He has had prepared for His habitation, will certainly feel how suitable and necessary this prayer is in our time. How little does Zion, the city of God, the dwelling-place of the Most High, exhibit the splendour of the New Jerusalem that once descended from heaven (Rev. xxi. 10). In the midst of severe toil and hot conflict, and much disappointment and numberless hindrances, living stones are being brought in, and the walls slowly rise. There is need of the earnest and urgent prayer: 'Build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.' Believers, who in this Psalm have learned to taste something of the grace of God, make this word also your own. In view of the declining life of the people of God and their failure in powerful growth in grace, in view of the growing fury of the onsets of unbelief and the service of the world, in view of the needs of millions that do not yet know the Lord, we pray you, let the grace shown to you rouse you to the persistent supplication: 'Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion: build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.'

Thirty-First Day.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

'Then shalt Thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, in burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar.'—Ver. 19.

WHEN God in His good pleasure shall do good to Zion, and shall build the walls of Jerusalem, a glorious time will dawn for the city and the people of God. *Then*, says David, shalt Thou delight in the sacrifices which shall be brought to Thee, and then shall the people also have delight and offer them with gladness upon Thine altar. In a preceding verse he had said: 'Thou delightest not in sacrifice.' In that utterance we found a proof of the deep spiritual insight that David had obtained into the insufficiency of the old covenant sacrifices. God could not take delight in these offerings as such, that is, as the work of man, coupled with so much unrighteousness that they could not take away, and with so much self-righteousness that found its nourishment in them. He had prepared for Himself some-

thing higher and better, namely, true obedience and the all-sufficient sacrifice of His Son (Ps. xl. 7, 8; Heb. x. 5–10). But, lo! David now understands by the self-same Spirit that had made known to him the hidden wisdom of the previous portion of this Psalm, that, when once Zion should again be visited by God, and the good pleasure of God towards her be made manifest, He should again take delight in the sacrifices of righteousness.

Very important lessons are taught us here. We see, first of all, how the worth of our religion depends wholly on our relation to God. The very same Psalm which says: 'Thou delightest not in sacrifice,' says again at a later turn: 'Then shalt Thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness.' In the interval betwixt these two statements, a momentous change must be regarded as having taken place. Sin having been atoned for, the good pleasure of God must now rest upon Zion, and her sacrifices must be acceptable to Him. No longer brought to take away unrighteousness, or to work out self-righteousness, but as a symbol of the self-dedication and thanksgiving of a justified people,—as 'sacrifices of righteousness,' they are such as God must really 'take pleasure in.' This teaches us something which is of the utmost importance in our intercourse with God; this, namely, that the value of all our works is defined by our relation to God. If we are not yet reconciled to God, if we have not yet received the atonement and forgiveness of sins in Christ, then our best works cannot be well-pleasing to God. If,

on the other hand, we have become the children of God, and the relation betwixt Him and us is as it should be, then He takes delight in our service and our works, and they are acceptable to Him. Hence it is said, as in the words of David, 'Thou delightest not in sacrifices,' but also again, 'Thou shalt delight in sacrifices': just as in the utterances of Paul, we read first, 'Not of works,' but then again as pointedly, 'Created unto good works' (Eph. ii. 9, 10). The very same works that, before faith, are worthy to be rejected, are, after faith, and in virtue of it, an acceptable service to God.

Thus we learn further that in all our religion the great question ought to be, whether the Lord takes pleasure in it, or whether our work is well-pleasing to Him. That Cain presented a sacrifice availed him little: God did not look upon his sacrifice. That we are earnest and zealous in religion avails us little: the great question is whether He takes delight in us and our sacrifice.

It is not how we pray and what we do that can bring us blessing: but the fact that God accepts our praying and our doing, and sends an answer to it. Many set themselves in a state of contentment when they think that they have done their best to serve God and obtain rest in this duty. With a living faith it is not so. It will not merely set the wood in order and slay the victim, but it will crave the fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice. It is bent on having a token for good, the light of God's countenance, a proof that the sacrifice is well-pleas-

ing and acceptable. It is not merely afraid of a self-willed religion, it not merely seeks to serve God with all earnestness in the way and after the manner ordained by Him; but it still desires to know on every occasion that God takes delight in its sacrifices. And by the secret and blessed exercise of fellowship with the High Priest in heaven which the witness of the Holy Spirit maintains in living activity with our spirit, this is really bestowed on faith. The tender-hearted believer may know it: 'Thou delightest in this sacrifice.'

David's word teaches us still further, that, when God thus takes delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, His people also will take delight in them. '*Then* shalt Thou delight': 'then shall they offer bullocks.' Yes: it may be easily conceived that there is nothing that shall more powerfully incite to a joyful and abounding service than the blessed certainty that God has delight in it. Does not many a one learn by experience to testify that it is just this that renders him indolent and dispirited in seeking the Lord: the fact, namely, that he did not know whether this search was acceptable, the fact that he obtained no token that God took delight in it? On the other hand, when we know that God does delight in our effort, and that every sacrifice is a joy to the Eternal, how does the heart become fired and strengthened for duty, and the sacrifice itself become a joy and a delight. Yes: the secret of true religion, of a joyful self-surrender and an entire obedience, is the joy of the assurance that

God delights in our sacrifices. '*Then shall we* offer bullocks upon Thine altar.'

Glorious time: when in the light of God's friendly countenance His people shall joyfully and willingly dedicate themselves wholly to Him. May the thought of it awaken in us with new earnestness the petition: 'Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion: build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.' Then shalt Thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness: then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar.' And may every approach to God with the prayer, 'Have mercy upon *me*, O God,' and every experience of the answer, strengthen us in the confidence that even in response to our prayer God will thus deal with Zion and do good to her, and that the hour shall be hastened when His great congregation shall bear the name of Hephzi-bah: 'My delight is in her' (Isa. lxii. 4).

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